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A BIOGRAPHY.

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By EDWARD SMITH.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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WILLIAM COBBETT:

A BIOGRAPHY.

CHAPTER XIV.

"I NEVER SAT MYSELF DOWN ANYWHERE, WITHOUT MAKING THE FRUITS AND FLOWERS TO GROW."

THE summer of 1805 finds Mr. Cobbett again at Botley with his family. A letter to Wright, dated 5th July, says, "I have found here a most delightful house and a more delightful garden." Preparations are being made for a prolonged stay, and for the occasional entertainment of his correspondent: "I have given you a deal of trouble, and hope that you will find hereafter some compensation during the time you will spend at Botley." The carpets are to be taken up (in Duke Street), and all the bedding, &c., to be "removed upstairs, packed in mats or something." On the 28th of July Cobbett writes—

"I am glad that you are like to close your labours so

soon, for I really wish very much to see you here, and so do all the children and their mother, all of whom have delightful health; and Mrs. Cobbett is more attached to Botley than I am—one cause of which is, she has made her servants humble, and she bakes good bread. I shall have made it a delightful place before you will have finished your volume."[1]

There is a good deal about Botley and its neighbourhood to charm the tastes of men like Cobbett. A fine open country, which was then to a great extent unenclosed—it was a genuine agricultural and sporting district, of which the little town was the centre. It was quiet enough, not being on the road to anywhere; and the people were as quiet as the village.

". . . . Two doctors, one parson. No trade, except that carried on by two or three persons, who bring coals from the Southampton water, and who send down timber. All the rest are farmers, farmers' men, millers, millers' men, millwrights, publicans who sell beer to the farmers' men and the farmers; copse-cutters, tree-strippers, bark-shavers, farmers' wheelwrights, farmers' blacksmiths, shopkeepers, a schoolmistress; and, in short, nothing but persons belonging to agriculture, to which, indeed, the two doctors and the parson belong as much as the rest."

As Cobbett himself described them a few years later. The creek of the little river Hamble

[1] The Parliamentary Debates.

touches the end of the principal street; and here was a tiny wharf, and a miller's house. On the farther side of the creek stood the "delightful house and more delightful garden," which promised such bliss. Here is one of the first resulting joys :—

"Now, I am going to give you a commission that you must do us the favour to execute with the least possible delay. It is to find out where fishing-nets are sold, and to buy us a net called a Flue or Trammel net. It must be five feet deep, and fifteen yards long; with plenty of linnet, and not too coarse. We have a river full of fish sweeping round the one side of our little lot of land; but for want of such a net, we catch comparatively but few. It will not cost above three or four pounds, and we shall gain that in fish in a month. But the salmon-peel are now coming up with the spring tides, and we hope you will be able to send us the net by the Southampton night coach of Monday, to be left at the coach-office till called for. If you should miss that coach pray get it off by the next after; for this is a subject with regard to which none of us have any patience. The net is for jack, trout, and salmon-peel, &c."

". . . . The net is excellent. Plenty of fish. Nobody has such an one in this place!"

". . . . Since last Saturday morning we have caught nearly as many fish as would sell in London for as much as the net cost you. We have, indeed, famous sport; and I wish to know if Mr. Windham be in town, that I may send him some of this excellent fish. When you come yourself we will show you what we can do; and I really hope that you will be able to get here soon."

Now, quiet Botley began to rub its eyes. Here was a new neighbour who kept the wheels of life well greased. Visitors came to and fro; and the coach, or the waggon, had more parcels to carry. The precious scribblings from Botley House augmented the weight of the post-bag.

As autumn drew nigh, the bucolic pulses were quickened by the rumoured revival of English rustic sports. So, quiet Botley was awakening into something like fame.

One of Mr. Windham's well-known fancies was the noble art of self-defence. Cobbett was entirely with him there; and it so happened, about this time, that a fatal case of pugilism had brought the matter before the public. Mr. Cobbett defended Boxing in the *Register*, and resolved to promote all kindred manly exercises.

Accordingly, a festive gathering was prepared, for this very first autumn. Here is a copy of the handbill:—

"SINGLE-STICK PLAYING AT BOTLEY, NEAR SOUTHAMPTON.

"On Friday, the 11th of October, 1805, being Old Michaelmas Day, will be played in the village of Botley, a grand match at single-stick. The prizes will be as follows:—

"1st prize, Fifteen guineas and a gold-laced hat.
"2nd „ Six guineas and a silver-laced hat.
"3rd „ Four guineas.
"4th „ Two guineas.

"The terms, as to playing the ties, &c., will be announced upon the spot. Those who have played for and lost the first prize, will be allowed to play for the second; those who have lost the second will be allowed to play for the third; and those who have lost the third will be allowed to play for the fourth. The playing will begin at eleven o'clock in the morning; and, if possible, all the prizes are to be played for on the same day. For any further information that may be required, application may be made, either in person or by letter, to Mr. RICHARD SMITH, of Botley.

"Gentlemen coming from a distance will find excellent accommodation of every kind at and in the neighbourhood of Botley, which is situated at only about five miles from Southampton, and at less than four miles from Bishops Waltham. The distance from London, through Farnham, Alton, and Bishops Waltham, is a short day's journey, being barely sixty-eight miles.

"*Botley, 23rd September*, 1805."

This announcement, scattered over Hampshire and Wiltshire, brought a good company together, and was the precursor of future successes of the same character. As a matter of course, however, Envy made of it another nail for the coffin of Mr. Cobbett's reputation;—these things were *so* demoralizing.

The revels being over, preparations for extensive planting were made, the month of October being largely taken up with the transfer of apples, pears, rose-trees, &c., to the newly cleared ground. A letter of the 4th November says,—

"I have almost got my trees planted, and shall have done completely in one week from this day. Excuse all this gardening plague, and look forward to the time when you are to find a compensation in the fruit."

The following, dated Botley, 1st December, 1805, throws much interesting light on then current prospects :—

"DEAR SIR,—On the other side you will find letters for William and Nancy, which you will be so good as to cut asunder and give to them respectively.

"Mrs. Cobbett and I have now fixed upon our plan and scale of living, and we mean to carry it into effect directly. We intend to live here from the 1st of May to the Queen's birthday in every year; to take a lodging in town for the three winter months; to put three of the children to school almost immediately; and, of course, to get rid of the house and furniture in Duke Street, as soon as I can get to town and put up the curtains, so as to make the house look neat and handsome. Of this you are to speak to nobody. I tell it you for your own information, and that you may be thinking of a place for a store-house. Suppose a winter lodging for thirteen weeks to cost us three guineas a week—that is 40*l.* Suppose my coach-hire to cost 20*l.* a year (ten trips between London and Alton)—that makes 60*l.* Suppose 20*l.* a year for store-room (it will not be above half that) —that makes 80*l.* a year. Very well: the house-rent, the taxes, the water-duty, and the interest of money upon goods and wear and tear of goods in Duke Street (besides the interest upon what I paid for the lease), amounts to more than 240*l.* a year. The garden-stuff

here is worth 25*l.* a year, exclusive of fruit of all sorts. The milk will not cost us above a third part of what it costs in town; bread is one-ninth cheaper (an immense sum in the year); the meat about an eighth cheaper. In short, I am fully convinced that exclusive of the consideration of health, and taking into the account postage, &c., &c., attendant upon this distant situation, that the saving would be at least 300*l.* a year. Fuel at Botley is little more than half the price of fuel in London. So much for that.

"Now, as to the present, my intention is to go to town as soon as this job shall be safely over. Then to let the house, and settle all about that matter. In the meanwhile, pray go on with your preparations. I like the type very well indeed; and, having now done with my improvements and planting (which has been most fortunately finished) I shall set myself about the prospectus, and shall, in short, make every preparation for most strenuous exertions. The post of to-day is not yet come in: it may bring me something. My present intention is to *fill* the next sheet with an address to the people of England, calculated to make a deep and lasting impression upon them. I shall endeavour to show them what has been the cause of all their present dangers; and shall tell them that, in a future sheet, I will endeavour to convince them that such and such are the means of salvation. The time is most favourable for making such an impression; and, please God, I will not let it slip. The crisis, which I have always foreseen, is approaching, fast approaching; and it will require all our vigilance and all our courage to save our country, and at the same time to maintain the throne of our beloved and gracious old king. . . .

". . . . The post is come. Thank you for your attention. The Bulletins may be set up for another number; but I shall, if I live and am well, *fill* the next in the manner I tell you. Adieu. Thank you very kindly for the hare. Watch the papers well. Pray take care of the children. Thank you for William.

"WM. C."

The newly projected great work is "The Parliamentary History," which is to contain a full report of all the recorded proceedings, from the earliest times to 1803, when "The Debates" were commenced. A prospectus appeared in the ensuing February. This valuable collection was completed in sixteen volumes, and has long since been an indispensable adjunct to a respectable library. Yet the name of its projector has, unaccountably, become dissociated from it.

There is reason to believe that these enterprizes were entailing pecuniary embarrassment. The increasing sale of the *Register* was producing a splendid income; but so much new printing—a greater part of which would require time for it to fructify—along with the settlement and extensive improvements at Botley, could not but exhaust Cobbett's resources for the time. In fact a purchase of premises at Droxford (a few miles from Botley), about this time, was made with borrowed money. Another scheme, early in 1805, had been a downright failure: this was "Cobbett's Spirit of

the Public Journals for 1804," being letters, essays, &c., taken from the English, American, and French journals; a work of inestimable value to the student of history and politics, but unattractive to the general reader. The following extract from a letter to Mr. Wright, dated October 16th, 1805, makes ominous reference to the money question :—

". . . . I have this one caution to give you, which I beg you will observe; and that is, never speak nor hint, in the presence of Mrs. Cobbett, anything relative to my pecuniary concerns, or concerns in trade, of any sort or kind. She has her own ideas about such matters, which cannot be altered.

"I have never mentioned the Spirit of the Public Journals to her; and there is no occasion for it. She knows I have lost so much by printing, &c., that she is fearful of everything of the kind. I cannot blame her anxiety; but as I cannot remove it, it is better not to awaken it. Always reserve these matters for *tête-à-tête* opportunities."

And, on the 29th December, in a letter to Mr. Wright, thanking him for his editorial labours, and expressing pleasure at having been the means of giving him another lift in the world, there is some sensitiveness upon money-matters :—

"My wishes, my wants too, and your own taste, turn of mind, and talents, have all conspired towards placing you beyond the reach of anxiety. But you should now look further. You should economize as much as

possible. . . . A horse, a cow, a house, is soon gone in even trifling things, which we give into from mere want of thought, and not from our love of things themselves."

A more interesting message occurs a day or two later:—

"Mind the twelfth-cake. A good large one!"

The plan proposed, of spending three months of the year in London lodgings, does not appear to have been carried out. During the spring of 1806, Cobbett was living for a short time at Parson's Green, Fulham; and in June he returned to Botley, permanently, only going up to London when occasion needed.

The year 1806 was pregnant with importance concerning the future of this country. The accession of "All the Talents" to power, after the death of Pitt, marked its commencement; and the nation was alive with hopes. Another abortive attempt was made to negociate peace with Napoleon. The affairs of India, Military Reform, Lord Melville's Impeachment, filled the public mind. But one matter, above all, which now came to the front: and which, after many years of lagging, now had a fair start,—was that of Parliamentary Reform.

And that which, at length, furnished the motive power to the wheels of Parliamentary Reform, was

no other than the invincible *Weekly Political Register* of Mr. William Cobbett. Fitful had hitherto been the progress made. Few persons of position had been in earnest about it. Very few had dared to give definiteness to their opinions; and the number of those who could be called advocates of Reform, could be counted on the fingers. The most prominent of these was Major Cartwright.[2]

So, upon Mr. Cobbett's wit and energy being devoted to the discussion of public abuses, and the only real remedy for them, he found himself surrounded by a new class of friends. Cartwright, Burdett, Bosville, and others, no longer singly held their cry,

[2] John Cartwright (1740—1823) was the boldest and the bravest champion of free speech, for forty years or more, during the reign of George the Third. Indeed, he was not unjustly styled "the Father of Reform." In early life he was in the navy, but left it after a short period of service, and became an officer in the militia. He produced a number of pamphlets, advocating all those ideas of popular rights which have since his time been generally accepted in England, the first one being in support of American Independence, published in 1774. But his writings were heavy in style, and could not live beyond his own times and the occasions which they served.

Major Cartwright's personal character was lofty and amiable, and Cobbett appears to have regarded him with peculiar affection. On one occasion of the Westminster Anniversary Dinner, in 1816, an opportunity occurred, under the following circumstances, of entering upon a protest, against the Major being overlooked among the new men who were finding it worth their while to pin their faith to the cause of Reform:—After the two members were toasted, as usual, there appeared the name of Brougham! Mr. Cobbett's wonder at this was changed into indignation upon finding Major Cartwright's name at the bottom of the list; and he declared he would not sit any longer at the table unless an alteration was made. So Brougham's name was taken out, and the Major's put in its place.

but rejoiced in their new exponent. Here was a man who had been learning all his lifetime, and who could manfully confess his political errors, not only in mere general terms, but to points of detail;—a man who had acquired the high privilege of being maligned, misrepresented, and threatened for the odious crime of speaking the truth in clear and unfaltering, although sarcastic, terms:—one "to whom the public eye turned for light and information." That was the view, at least, taken by many of the correspondents of the *Register*. So, if Mr. Cobbett was heaping up wrath in one quarter, his name and his talents were being recognized in another. The people were looking to him,—not the "swinish multitude" of Mr. Burke, nor the "lower orders" of Mr. Wilberforce, but the people who paid the taxes and wanted to see where the money went to.

There was a Mr. Robson, M.P. for Honiton, who particularly "wanted to know," and insisted on knowing, the truth about certain abuses in the Barrack Department. The truth came out, with a story very much akin to a dead-and-buried affair, in which a former Serjeant to the 54th regiment was concerned. Mr. Cobbett took it up, and even assisted, by interviews with the parties concerned, in helping to expose the matter. The incident is chiefly noticeable, in this history, as being the occasion, alas! of a divergence of sentiment be-

tween himself and Windham; who, as Secretary at War, had not met Robson's motions for inquiry in a spirit according with the professions of his out-of-office days. "Surely there is something in the air of the offices that lowers the minds of men!" was the exclamation of Cobbett; "it was with still better reason than I thought, that I recommended a clean sweeping and a fumigation of the haunts of the Pitts and the Roses!"

At this juncture, Mr. Cavendish Bradshaw, the second member for Honiton, accepted an office which required him to vacate his seat. Upon seeking re-election he found an unexpected opponent in the person of Mr. Cobbett, who hastily issued an address to the electors, offering his services, in the event of no other public-spirited man coming forward. At the last moment, Lord COCHRANE appeared, having in the meantime read Cobbett's letter to the electors; and the latter withdrew in Lord Cochrane's favour.[3] Mr. Cobbett, however, made a long speech at the hustings, in temperate but most eloquent terms; ridiculing the claims of a sinecure-placeman upon the con-

[3] "When I went as a candidate to Honiton, in the year 1806, I began by posting up a bill, having at the top of it this passage of Scripture, 'Fire shall consume the tabernacles of bribery.' After this I addressed myself to the people of the place, telling them how wicked and detestable it was to take bribes. Most of the corrupt villains laughed in my face, but some of the women actually cried out against me in the streets, as a man that had come to rob them of their *blessing!*" (*Register*, xlviii. 500.)

stituency. Mr. Bradshaw's remarks were short; but they included the instructive information that the last speaker was a "convicted libeller." Well, the people of Honiton couldn't afford to throw away their two-guineas-a-head; so, Mr. Bradshaw was re-elected.

A dissolution of parliament was now imminent, and the new forces promised themselves a glorious time of it. The following letter, dated Botley, 7th July, points to the increasing prominence of Mr. Cobbett's share in the campaign:—

". . . As to Mr. Robson's re-election, I verily believe he would carry it for Westminster; and I would go up and aid him with all my might if he would stand upon my principle. He would surely carry it. Let me know when the dissolution is to take place. Give me, in your next letter, the very best intelligence you can get upon the subject, for I must begin without loss of time, to address the electors all over the kingdom.

"Between you and me, my opinion is, that *I should not come forward now*, unless some body of electors were to call me forward.[4] Most men like me have been

[4] The following advertisement, to the Electors of Westminster, was addressed to them in September, and appears in the *Morning Post* of the 19th:—

"Gentlemen,—Having, some time ago, publicly stated that, at the General Election then looked for, and in the case then supposed, it appeared to me that I ought to offer myself to you as a candidate; having now been informed that, in consequence of that statement, a very general expectation has been entertained that, upon this accidental occasion, I should so offer myself; and having, by many individuals of your respectable body, been pressingly urged to fulfil

ruined in reputation by their haste to get forward. If the great objects which I have at heart could be accomplished without my being in parliament, I should greatly prefer it. I should first attend to my own family. I am perfectly sincere in all my public professions. But I will flinch from nothing that may tend to effect the great purpose of saving the country, which is now, every day, in more and more danger. . . . I wrote to Mr. Paull yesterday. I highly approve of his activity and zeal; but he is, be assured, too fond of the Bond Street set—

that expectation; thus situated, I think it my duty, *first*, explicitly to declare that, for the present, I relinquish the honour intended me, and for this sole reason, that at this time I find it would be next to impossible for me to devote myself wholly and exclusively to the discharge of the great duties which, by your suffrages, would necessarily be imposed; and, *secondly*, to warn you against the calamity, the shame, the deep disgrace, that await you and your country if, yielding to the venal solicitations of the stewards and butlers of noblemen, you condescend to become the menials of menials, the laquies of laquies,—and suffer the popular, the industrious, the enlightened and public-spirited city of Westminster, hitherto considered as the ever-burning lamp of the liberties of England, to be handed to-and-fro like a family borough. Confidently trusting that you will, with indignation, resent any project for thus extinguishing the fame of your city and degrading the character of her electors; confidently trusting that, when you consider that it is to you all other free cities and boroughs look for an example, you will tear in rags the gaudy livery now tendered for your backs; confidently trusting that, when the question is *freedom* or *bondage*, you will suspend all animosities and differences, and act with a degree of energy and unanimity that shall at once and for ever blast the hopes of all those who would make you the instruments of your country's ruin; thus trusting, and with a mind full of gratitude for the goodwill which many of you have taken occasion to express towards myself, —I remain, &c., WILLIAM COBBETT."

Oddly enough, this advertisement precedes a highly abusive paragraph on "this low-bred man." The *Post* was a good hater of the lower orders.

has too great a desire to live amongst *the great*, to aim at the only objects that can save the throne and the liberties of the people.

"P.S.—We have at last got some rain, which was wanted to prevent my trees from being totally burnt up."

And, on the 17th :—

". . . I hope Mr. Robson will come down here this summer, and he and I will then settle upon a general scheme for an examination into the public expenditure. We will leave no branch untouched. Pray give my best respects to him, and tell him to take care of his health. Tell him that if he intends to stand for Honiton, he shall have my aid in preference to all other men upon earth and my aid is something, after all. I think him the most valuable man in parliament, and I hold it my duty to assist him in all his endeavours."

The following extracts from letters of July—October, will illustrate several incidents and opinions :—

". . . You opened my nephew's letter, which I have before told you I have an objection to. This is what you would not like ; and, in short, it is what I must say that I cannot permit. . . . You opened a letter from Mrs. Cobbett's brother to her ; and I did hope that my remark at the time would save me the pain of making a direct injunction like this. I am in no anger, and I wish to have no answer. The thing is now gone from my mind, and there, I hope, it never will return."

". . . I greatly approve of what you are about to do with respect to Mr. Finnerty, to whom I beg you to

present my best respects. As to Westminster, I hope Fox will live long yet; for I am always afraid, that if he were dead, tyranny, sheer unmixed *tyranny*, would be let loose upon the land. I am in no haste to become anything but what I am; and never will I be anything else by the usual base means resorted to by candidates. The time must come, when either such principles as mine will prevail, or when no principles at all will be of any use."

". . . Last Friday, I caught a very bad cold indeed, a-fishing, which I have not yet got rid of, though I rode ten miles this morning. . . .

"Lauderdale is off, I hear, but I do not believe there will be any peace. It is not the least consequence, however, to anybody. Our affairs in this country will march on steadily towards the great point at which, sooner or later, they must arrive.

"I want to know, by return of post, whether Mr. Robson intends to stand for Honiton; for if he does not, another person has asked me to write thither in *his* favour. This is of great importance; for, I have told the person that I will so write, if Mr. Robson does not stand; but, if he does, I am decidedly for him in preference to any other man. Pray get me the necessary information upon this head.

"Lord and Lady H. Stuart come here to-morrow; Mr. Paull will come on Friday and stay till Sunday most likely; and on Sunday comes another person for two days; so that you had better come on the 12th or 13th [August] instant; for we shall have no leisure at all if anybody is here. . . . Your pain in your side should be taken care of. I am sure country exercise is the thing. I speak from experience. A jolting upon the coach-box is excellent."

". . . I am particularly interested by what you say about Mr. Robson's views with regard to the next parliament; and I think with you, that for him to be safely returned is an object of the very first consequence. . . . But, proportioned to my anxiety for his election, is my hope that what I have heard suggested is not true, viz., that he has an understanding with Bradshaw. That were disgrace, indeed! Disgraceful in all manner of ways; for how could he raise his voice against pensions and sinecures, after having acted in conjunction with a sinecure-placeman? This would be so shamefully bad, that I cannot think of it without shuddering. Surely Lord Cochrane and he could carry it for Honiton:[5] but then, Mr. Robson must, and without loss of time, make his declaration both to the borough and to Lord Cochrane, or else, he may depend that the whole force of the Cochranes will be brought to bear against him."

". . . I have put off what I intended to write until to-morrow. To this I have been moved, in part by a desire to see the *Morning Post* before I begin; but, in truth, much more by a desire to go and see a new pointer of Farmer Hoad's hunt. This, viewed in the abstract, is very bad; but, when it is considered that this exercise gives me health and nerves, and that these produce *Registers*, the time is not thrown away. . . ."

". . . The *Morning Post* man labours hard.[6] But it

[5] In the end, Bradshaw and Cochrane were elected, and Mr. Robson found a seat as representative for Oakhampton.

[6] This is with reference to a glorious newspaper squabble, especially entertaining on account alike of the circumstances which aroused it and of the combatants engaged. The first attempt to defame the Princess of Wales had just been made, and the *Morning Post* took up the illustrious lady and the "infamous calumny" into its protecting breast. The fulsome style, and the dark insinuations

will nought avail him. He must give us a good reason *why* the Princess does not publish the report and evidence, or he had better hold his tongue.

"I had forgotten the HATS. Get them from the same man :—

(gold-laced)

And one silver-laced, the same words, only 10 guineas

conveyed, aroused Mr. Cobbett, and he, while asserting his indifference to the question until there was really some charge, on one side or the other, upon which to comment, wanted to know what the *Post* meant by stating that the Princess had been guilty of *no levities, but such as no woman in the land was free from.* Ever the champion of the sex, he begged for an explanation. Week after week the question was put, and reiterated with new zest. There was no answer; but only column after column of abuse upon the head of the "gross and abominable writer," "this low-bred man," this "modern Jack Cade," &c. "This gross and abominable writer is exposed to the merited detestation of all classes, especially the more elevated, whom this writer has, in his revolutionary cant, described as the well-dressed rabble of the readers of the *Morning Post. We hope the Attorney-General will look to this.*" A very silly and abusive pamphlet followed, under the wing of the *Post:* "Strictures on Cobbett's Unmanly Observations relative to the Delicate Investigation; and a Reply to the Answer to an Admonitory Letter to H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, containing an Account of the True Cause why the Commissioners' Report has not yet been Published, and many other Additional Facts, &c." (London, 1806). Here is one of the additional facts :—"Vain, contemptible slanderer! where in all thy calumnious pages is one unanswerable argument?"

in the centre. The city of Salisbury has advertised that a match will take place there on the 17th instant, 'similar to that at Botley.' The hats must be here on Saturday at farthest. They need not be very good. A hat at a guinea will do very well; and as to the lace, I am sure that it need not cost more than about a guinea-and-a-half. However, do the best you can.

"Lord Cochrane is here, hard at work a-shooting, but Mr. Johnstone is not yet arrived."

"We shall be in town to-morrow night, and I wish you could come to me about 10 o'clock at Col. Johnstone's in Harley Street.

"A glorious match have we had! A fine day, and a company of people not less than six thousand in number. The whole of the village was full. Stages, in the form of amphitheatres, were erected against the houses, and, perhaps, seats let to the amount of thirty or fifty pounds! Every gentleman round the country was here. The subscription pays the whole of all the expenses, without throwing any more than my single guinea and the price of my dinner upon me. The city of Salisbury will not equal this, take my word for it. There were twenty-three players. The first prize went to Somersetshire, and the second to Wiltshire. But the great contest was between the former county and Hampshire."

". . . The little mare went off on Friday. Keep her well, use her regularly and gently, and I hope she will prove of use. William followed her with his eyes as long as he could get a glimpse of her; and the poor dear fellow could not speak a word all the evening after she went off. He was made somewhat more happy by my assuring him that she was not sold, and that she was gone to you. Fit her well with saddle and bridle,

and have a curb, for she is apt to run off, though *your weight* will be a tolerably good curb. The main thing is to see her well fed upon good hay and oats."

". . . The little dogs came very safe; and they are both (having been new named Tipler and Daisy) at Steeple Court Farm, there to be reared up to dog-hood. I was yesterday at Meon Stoke, where we had some very fine coursing. We found five hares. Two stole off; three we coursed, and killed two. There was one large greyhound dog; but my little bitches beat him hollow. They go like the wind. . . . Lord Northesk, who lives at Rose Hill, near Winchester, has been here again to invite me there a-coursing; and I shall go next Saturday, if I am alive and well."

". . . As to your coming down, when you do come, I wish you to stay a week or ten days. You must go with us a-coursing; and I will take care to have a good field for sport provided. . . . . If you never saw any coursing, you have a great pleasure to come; and you will see William ride his pony and leap over the ditches."

Amongst new acquaintances of this year was no less a person than Dr. Mitford, probably introduced to Cobbett by Sir William Elford, who was a vigorous Windhamite. The Doctor's passion for coursing consolidated a friendship which lasted for several years; and we find Cobbett visiting him in December, 1806, at Bertram House, near Reading, from which place several articles in the *Register* are dated. Miss Mitford has several

pleasing recollections of Cobbett, for whom she had considerable esteem.[7]

But, of all his Hampshire friends, there was none

[7] Among other references to Cobbett, Miss Mitford records a visit to Botley ("Recollections of a Literary Life," chap. xvii.) :—

"Sporting, not politics, had brought about our present visit and subsequent intimacy. . . . . He had at that time a large house at Botley, with a lawn and gardens sweeping down to the Bursledon river. . . . . His house, large, high, massive, red, and square, and perched on a considerable eminence, always struck me as being not unlike its proprietor. It was filled at that time almost to overflowing. Lord Cochrane was there, then in the very height of his warlike fame, and as unlike the common notion of a warrior as could be—a gentle, quiet, mild young man. . . . .

"There was a large fluctuating series of guests for the hour or guests for the day, of almost all ranks and descriptions, from the earl and his countess to the farmer and his dame. The house had room for all, and the hearts of the owners would have had room for three times the number. I never saw hospitality more genuine, more simple, or more thoroughly successful in the great end of hospitality—the putting everybody completely at ease. There was not the slightest attempt at finery, or display, or gentility. They called it a farmhouse, and everything was in accordance with the largest idea of a great English yeoman of the old time. Everything was excellent, everything abundant, all served with the greatest nicety by trim waiting-damsels ; and everything went on with such quiet regularity that of the large circle of guests not one could find himself in the way. I need not say a word more in praise of the good wife, ... to whom this admirable order was mainly due. She was a sweet motherly woman. . . . .

"At this time William Cobbett was at the height of his political reputation ; but of politics we heard little, and should, I think, have heard nothing, but for an occasional red-hot patriot, who would introduce the subject, which our host would fain put aside, and got rid of as speedily as possible. There was something of *Dandie Dinmont* about him, with his unfailing good-humour and good spirits, his heartiness, his love of field sports, and his liking for a foray. He was a tall, stout man, fair and sunburnt, with a bright smile, and an air compounded of the soldier and the farmer, to

so staunch as Viscount Folkestone,[8] a rising whig politician of the day; a man who endeavoured to carry the principles of his pretentious Party into practice, and honestly believed that Mr. Cobbett was, with all his untamable vigour, one of the best exponents of the current political aspirations. Although the time came when, in 1834, their opinions diverged on the Poor Law question, their mutual regard lasted to the very end.

which his habit of wearing an eternal red waistcoat contributed not a little. . . . .

"Few persons excelled him in the management of vegetables, fruit, and flowers. His green Indian corn, his Carolina beans, his water-melons, could hardly have been exceeded at New York. His wall-fruit was equally splendid; and, much as flowers have been studied since that day, I never saw a more glowing or a more fragrant autumn garden than that at Botley, with its pyramids of hollyhocks, and its masses of china-asters, of cloves, of mignonette, and of variegated geranium. The chances of life soon parted us, as, without grave faults on either side, people do lose sight of one another; but I shall always look back with pleasure and regret to that visit."

[8] Afterwards 3rd Earl Radnor. He died in 1869, at a very advanced age, after a life of real usefulness. Had there been more such men as he, the domestic history of England, in our century, would be a different tale.

CHAPTER XV.

"I DID DESTROY THEIR POWER TO ROB US, ANY LONGER, WITHOUT THE ROBBERY BEING PERCEIVED."

IN September, 1806, Mr. Charles James Fox died, and left one of the seats for Westminster at the disposal of the Whigs. For several years there had been a truce between the Whigs and the Tories, over this celebrated constituency, and each party was represented there. Accordingly, Earl Percy was quietly suffered to succeed to Mr. Fox.

The Whig nominee was no sooner elected, however, than a dissolution, which had been for some time imminent, took place, and the two factions, in their mutual consent, put up Mr. Sheridan and Admiral Hood, Lord Percy having declined to come forward again. Sheridan was a man who was for the winning side, whichever it might be, and he now laid claim to the mantle of Mr. Fox, whose name and whose party had been steadily growing into favour.

During the summer and autumn, Mr. Cobbett had been lecturing the electors of Westminster upon their duties. He pointed out that, with such traditions as theirs, there was less excuse for "base conduct" than in any other body of electors; yet, that the constituency was sinking to the level of a nomination-borough. *Base conduct* meant: clamouring against "peculators and depredators," and then being led by the nose by men who not only "clamoured," but pledged their word to reform, and to inquire into abuses; and who, immediately they got a snug office, found ready excuses for the non-fulfilment of their promises. The case in point was that of Mr. Sheridan, who, now that he was treasurer to the navy, declined to bring forward charges which he had threatened, "lest he should thereby create divisions in the ministry, that is to say, lest he should lose his place." Mr. Cobbett was requested by a small section to come forward himself; but he refused. The advertisement in the *Morning Post* of 19th September, announces his determination (vide note, p. 14). But he was actually proposed, on the hustings, by a Mr. Hewlings.

Mr. Cobbett's candidate was James Paull:—

"A Scotchman who had been in India, who had been in Parliament during two sessions, who had brought articles of charge against the elder Wellesley for his conduct while Governor-General of India, who was a little man in point of size, who talked pretty well, who

wrote better than half of the 658, who was perfectly honest and disinterested, and who was brave to the backbone, and persevering beyond any man. The Whigs had all along been deceiving this Mr. Paull, as they always have done every one else who has trusted in them. They, by leading him to believe that they would support his charge against old Wellesley, induced him to go on with the charges until they themselves got into power, and *then they turned against him*, and set all their whispering myrmidons to work to spread about that he had been a tailor, and that he was only accusing Lord Wellesley in order to get some money from him. I became acquainted with Mr. Paull, from his having been introduced to me by Mr. Windham, who strongly urged me to render him any assistance in my power in his undertaking against Wellesley; and I can truly say, that a more disinterested and honourable man I never knew in my life.

"At this election, therefore, Mr. Paull was fixed upon for us to put forward, in order to break up the infamous combination of these two factions, and to rescue Westminster from the disgrace of submitting to them any longer. This was *my work*:[1] it was my own project: I paved the way to it by my addresses to the people of Westminster. . . . . Hood was the Tory candidate; Sheridan the Whig candidate, having Whitbread and Peter Moore for his bottle-holders. They beat the

[1] All this sketch (in Cobbett's own words, written in 1832) is as faithful as it is graphic. The event provided ample resource for the witlings of the day. See, for example, "A History of the Westminster Election in November, 1806," with its coloured picture of the hustings; also, "The Rising Sun; a Serio-comic Satiric Romance," vol. ii., in which Paull's bottle-holder appears as *Mr. Cobwell*, a man of great talents and strength of mind," &c.

people, but it was such a beat as pronounced their doom for the future, as far as Westminster was concerned. At the close of the election, Hood and the base Sheridan slipped away from the hustings into the Church of St. Paul, Covent Garden, just opposite the porch of which the hustings stood, and there they were locked up nearly all the night, with constables and policeman to guard the church. . . . . Being in November, there was a plentiful supply of mud, with which the honourable representatives were covered all over from the forehead down to their shoes. I never shall forget them. They looked just like a couple of rats, raked up from the bottom of a sewer; and the High Bailiff, and his books, and his clerks, and his beadles, were all covered over in the same manner."

Mr. Paull had started at the top of the poll. But as the days wore on, the others gained slowly upon him, until, at the close, he was left in a small minority. It was found, however, upon an analysis of the voting, that Paull had polled 3077 plumpers, against Sheridan's 955, and Sir Samuel Hood's 1033, whilst the coalition of the two latter had given them each 3240 split votes. Paull's total was 4481. These figures were solemnly put upon record by the friends of reform (as they now called themselves), in order to show "the manner in which Mr. Paull had been defeated."

An interesting conflict ensued, between Cobbett and Sheridan, which must not go unnoticed. When the former was attacked by Sheridan in parliament,

in August, 1803 (as before related), it was a wilful and unnecessary throwing down of the gauntlet. Mr. Sheridan was not the man who should find fault with another's popularity-hunting, much less another's inconsistency; and Mr. Cobbett proceeded to give him the inevitable "Series of Letters," [2] with which he usually favoured the objects of his animadversion. Mr. Sheridan, now crowing on the Westminster hustings, imputes *low birth* to his opponents; Mr. Paull's father was only a tailor, and, as for his bottle-holder, why all the world knows his story. And all the world (except Mr. Sheridan) might have guessed what would have come of that. "Whence came the Sheridans? From a play-actor! from a member of that profession, the followers of which are, in our wise laws, considered and denominated *vagabonds*." And Mr. Cobbett proceeds further, and wants to know what are the public services of these persons, Sheridan and his son Thomas, that they should be receiving between seven and eight thousand pounds of the public money? So Tom Sheridan offers to fight, according to a speech of his own at a Sheridan dinner:—

[2] Afterwards collected into a volume, under the title of "The Political Proteus: a view of the Character and Conduct of R. B. Sheridan, Esq.," &c., and published by Budd and others. Sheridan's "dramatic loyalty" (as it was happily expressed), was a constant theme of the caricaturists of the day. Cobbett makes a note, in one of his "summaries," of twenty-five public pledges which Sheridan had abandoned, and promises that they shall be "detailed" one of these days."

"This man, for his roughness and vulgarity towards my father (whom I think I may fairly describe as the person in whom eloquence may be said to preside), I had intended to thrash, and for that purpose I went down to his house with a cane, but he was not at home. I afterwards thought it best to offer him a pistol, and wrote to him for the purpose, but this valiant Mr. Cobbett answered me by saying that he never fought duels."

Of course, the only utility of this sort of thing, was to provide material for satire; and Cobbett, on his part, never failed to remind Sheridan of his foibles, nor ceased to look upon his "statesmanship" with the contempt it deserved.

The result of this general election was promising enough, to the increasing band of reformers. But, another dissolution, in the following spring, gave a still greater impulse to the popular feeling. Sir Francis Burdett and Lord Cochrane headed the poll at Westminster, leaving Elliott (a Windhamite), Sheridan, and Paull out in the cold. It was as early as this that Mr. Cobbett began to suspect Burdett's sincerity concerning Reform; and he refused, on account of Sir Francis declining to act with Paull,[3] to interfere in this election, although

[3] The misunderstanding between Burdett and Paull culminated in a duel, in which both were wounded. The affair was a rather silly one, and brought out some wit. Mr. Paull was a little, fiery man, or he would have succeeded better as a politician. Mr. Horne Tooke said to him one day, "You are a bold man, and I am certain you'll succeed; only, as Cobbett says, *keep yourself cool.*"

Lord Cochrane begged him to do so. But the powerful *Register* was as active as ever in the contest of principles which was being waged.

We may now glance at some of the correspondence of this winter, 1806-7.

". . . . This last expression puts me in mind of what I thought to mention to you in my last; and that is, my intention to *insure my life.* A small sum annually will be well laid out this way; and I feel that I ought to do it. My family is now large, and it is my bounden duty to do all I am able to provide for them in the manner that least exposes them to chance. Pray inquire about this, and let me know the result of your inquiries in a few days.

"We send you by the waggon of to-night a fine hamper of garden things, two fowls, and a chine included, which we think will be acceptable. Pray send us back the hamper by the waggon, and also a hamper from Mr. Paull's. There is a box at Mr. Paull's with flower-roots in it. You may as well send it too.

"Ellen is to be christened on Thursday. Mrs. Cobbett begs you will send off by to-morrow night's mail-coach a good lusty twelfth-cake for the christening. . . . Your letters are very cheerful, and, I can assure you, they come to a very healthy and happy house.

"I propose, in future, to write to you only upon Fridays, and that you shall write to me only upon Tuesdays, except upon particular occasions. . . . . In order that I may profit as much as possible from your correspondence you should begin a sheet and fill it up as thoughts or facts occur."

A chronic complaint of Cobbett's, throughout his life, was being exposed to the payment of unfranked letters. A renewed notice to friends and correspondents appears in January, 1807, informing them that he will not take in such letters. A message to Mr. Wright, about this time, gives him directions on the subject, and mentions that 12*s.* a week would not pay the postage of letters, of no use at all, and many of them sent merely for persecution.

". . . . The whole world united would not shake my resolution to *reside in the country*. The opinions of 'friends,' experience has taught me not to prefer, upon all occasions, to my own; and you know as well as I do, that those 'friends' generally speak as convenience or interest dictate. As I know you are perfectly sincere in the regret that you express at not having an opportunity of seeing me and mine oftener, so you may be assured that the loss of the pleasure of frequently seeing you, my Lord Folkestone, Sir Francis Burdett, and one or two more, is the greatest, and indeed the only, drawback from the stock of comfort and of pleasure which this domestic and rural life affords me. It will be very convenient to us for you and Mr. Murphy to come at any time. We have had no company since my return from town, and we expect none; but I am sure that none that could come would render your and Mr. Murphy's company at all inconvenient. The time you mention will be as good as any. The sooner the better; but you must stay a whole week. And bring good boots with you, for we shall make you ride a-coursing. The children talk of

you every day of their lives. William has been out with us this morning, and we have had a course worth all the balls and routs and operas that the whole town ever saw. Hares are hard to find. We sometimes go out without seeing one; but, when we do find, upon these lofty hills and open commons, you can have no idea of the beauty of the course. It lasts but a minute or two or three; but in one minute these beautiful animals go more than a mile.

". . . . We intend putting William to a school at Salisbury; but I am resolved he shall waste none of his precious time upon the 'learned languages.'[4] He reads and writes very tolerably well now; and, if I live so long, I hope to see him able to do something in the way of usefulness, in the space of five years from this. He has learnt to course already. To-day again (for we catch every fine open day) we had a course surpassing anything I ever saw in all my life. We were hardly upon the common when we found a hare *sitting* (a very rare thing upon heath). All the rest, namely William, Frederick, and my man, took their stations in such places as enabled them to follow the dogs, and to see the course, whichever way she might take. I then went and started her. We had a course of thirty turns at least, and, after a very long and most beautiful course, we had the pleasure to see her save her life by darting to the copse with Princess not twelve feet behind her. The dogs were terribly cut

[4] "The Learned Languages" was the title of a controversy which arose in the *Register* early in 1807. Mr. Cobbett was out of his sphere on this topic, and his correspondents (who were at all humorous) saw a ready application of the fable concerning a fox who had lost his tail. Others were more serious, and thought that the knowledge of the Latin and Greek classics "kept together the higher orders of society, and separate from the lower orders."

and strained, but they will be well again before you and Mr. Murphy come."

There is a great importation of American trees early this year, which gives Mr. Wright some trouble to attend to, out of his ordinary line; in return for which he is to have a farm some day, and American trees to beautify it with. He is expected at Botley again in March, and is to bring, amongst other matters, "two quarto blank books, with a good stiff cover, for Nancy to copy her grammar lessons in. I am teaching her; she learns very fast," &c. And, they "all go to church of a Sunday."

An impending duel between Mr. Elliott and Mr. Paull is alluded to in the following:—

". . . . The third is an article about Paull and Elliott. Leave out the words *manly* and *excellent* as applied to Paull's letter; and, observe, soften every phrase that I have used in commendation of him or his conduct, if any such you find; for I now see that he has been challenging; and I will have nothing more to do with him, until I see a total change of conduct in this respect."

". . . . I am glad Mr. Paull is exposed to no prosecution. I trust he will take great care. I have a hundred times warned him of his danger. They would imprison him as sure as he is alive. . . . . I shall always defend Mr. Paull and his cause; but you know how I abhor anything covert; and, upon my word, I cannot say that a man who would consent to be sent to a hiding-place, ought to be believed upon his oath. Those

that are used to such devices may look upon them calmly; but this is not, and I hope in God it never will be, the case with, yours, &c."

A petition against Sheridan's return for Westminster, on the part of Paull, now provided matter for discussion; and this, along with the unceasing campaign against sinecures, and the sudden dispersion of the *lost sheep* (as "All the Talents" were now called), kept the ready writer going merrily. Too merrily, indeed; a little cloud was gathering. Lord Grenville confided to somebody, that Cobbett was destroying the characters of all public men. Lord Howick[5] became unfavourably impressed with his vehemence, and threatened prosecution. Above all, the anonymous press had no mercy upon him, although it prudently avoided fair discussion. In March, Wright is asked for his opinion as to men's feelings, in town.

"As to the result, I fear nothing. And the way to fear nothing, is to act always fairly and honestly."

Only let him have open ground to go upon, and a good sight at the enemy.

Early in April, Mr. Cobbett writes:—

"What you told me about Mitford's report has given me some uneasiness, on account of the trouble that prosecutions would give me; but as to the House, the d——

[5] Afterwards Earl Grey, who carried the Reform Bill of 1832.

House, I set it at defiance, if it will only confine its vengeance to its own villainous powers. It is not, however, worth while to make any inquiries. It would be a good jest for the Whigs to begin to prosecute now. I'll assure you, I was most cursedly afraid of them before. Howick is a perfect Bashaw; and apostates are proverbially persecutors. God knows I need say no harm of either party. They furnish me with ample quantities of good and true censure of one another. I am deeply impressed with the necessity of caution; but if they are resolved to plague, plague they may. Should anything of this sort happen, I am determined to plead my own cause, be the consequence what it may. . . . . This talk of prosecution has exasperated me against them beyond measure; and my own safety shall be the only standard of my vengeance. Villains! They profess liberty; they set their hired scoundrels to write me and truth out of countenance; and the moment they feel the weight of my lash, they talk of the law, that law against which they have so much enveighed, which they know to be so unjust, and the administration of which they know to be so basely partial.

"Cultivate Lord C[ochrane] and Colonel J[ohnstone]. They are good and true friends to us, and, what is more, to their country.

"Pray send the *Chronicle*, when there is any violent or severe attack upon ministers or Parliament. Green[6] has been complaining to Reeves. The mean dog! Reeves begs me to spare him. I shall tell Reeves the provoca-

[6] Otherwise John Gifford. Cobbett had made an allusion to his change of name, parenthetically adding, "for cogent reasons, no doubt."

tion. If the rascal thus smarts at a parenthesis, what would he do at a sentence such as I could treat him with? As to the line of politics, *safe* is the word. . . . . I hear that my friend Finnerty's 100*l.* is coming out. Oh what a d—— thing this writing for hire is! The motion[7] has cost me more labour than I thought for, wishing to work in many interesting facts. . . ."

The new elections are coming on in April, and Mr. Cobbett is determined not to interfere, unless positively compelled. As soon as the election is over, he will "set about writing sober essays of *exposure:* quote from official documents, state the bare facts, and lament, as I most sincerely do, the inevitable consequences." He foresees the inutility of Mr. Paull contesting Westminster again, and the event proves that he is right. But he continues his unasked-for advice to the electors. And he does keep to facts, facts which all who have eyes may see. Seats in Parliament are being openly advertised for sale in the daily papers,[8]—in *Whig* papers; and this villainous scribbler presses for an explanation, particularly from that party which is always flaunting the flag of 1688, and which yet rails at

[7] Mr. Robson's renewed motion on the Barrack-office. Cobbett prepared and wrote out these motions for him.

[8] "Seat in a Certain Assembly.—Any gentleman having the disposal of a close one may apply," &c., &c.—*Morning Post*, May 1, 1807.

"A Certain Great Assembly.—Fourteen hundred guineas per annum will be given for a seat in the above Assembly. Letters addressed to," &c., &c.—*Morning Chronicle*, May 21, 1807.

him, and abuses him, and calls him nicknames, for trying to hold them to their principles.

As for his own writings, conscious though he be of their power and clearness, and of the admiration excited by them in the minds of all who are not the recipients of his lashing, he will be more than ever guarded in expression :—

". . . . I see the fangs of the law open to grasp me, and I feel the necessity of leaving no hold for them, and even no ground for silly cavillers, upon the score of coarseness or violence. I am armed with undeniable facts, and my reasoning (at least in my own opinion of it) shall be as undeniably conclusive. The times are auspicious to us, and we have nothing to fear but the effects of ungovernable indignation."

". . . . As to the 'large pamphlet that is coming out against us all,' the larger it is, the better it will be for the author ; for the fewer people will read it, and the fewer the readers, the fewer those who will despise him. That any creature upon two legs should be so foolish !"

In the early part of this history, allusion was made to the growing impoverishment of the labouring classes. A quarter of a century was now elapsed, since the Hereditary Pauper started into being ; and his race was now numbered by the million. The parishes were raising six millions sterling, for purposes of relief ; and the recipients were going steadily down, down, down. They were becoming practically enslaved. The average rural

labourer was now feeding upon bread, vegetables, and water. His children were uneducated ; his wife was in rags; his dwelling was either a ruin or a hovel.

And, it is very curious matter for reflection, to note how ready the comfortable classes were to acquiesce in tolerating this state of things. Schemes of amelioration were broached by a few, but they were generally based upon a total ignorance of first-cause. Your social tinker,—amiable, bland, and very serious,—caught a glimpse of the poor wretches so far beneath him ; and, straightway recollecting the words of Scripture, that the poor should "never cease out of the land," opened his purse-strings, exhorted his friends to do the like,—and left matters worse than before.[9] Your local authority, and your parson-pluralist, deeply impressed with the need of preserving the "indispensable gradations of society," in their full integrity, refused a cow to the cottager, lest he should be thereby rendered too independent! absolutely ignorant of the fact, that forty or fifty

[9] Even Mr. Wilberforce, busied with the wrongs of distant races, had remarkably low and narrow views concerning the *lower orders* of his own country, as he called them. In 1801, he "nearly resolves" to move in Parliament for a grant of one million for their relief! At another time he thinks Government should relieve, privately, some of the distress, "and afterwards allege that they did not do so publicly for fear of producing a mischievous effect abroad." And one's patience is almost exhausted at hearing him call the people "tainted" with disaffection, when everybody knows they are starving. *Vide* his "Life, &c.," iii., 3, 6, 13.

years previously, the rural labourer not only had his cow,—but his pigs, his geese, his beer, and his bacon, and a tolerable share of the comforts of life: his outward condition, in point of fact, being scarcely inferior to that of the farmers, and even the clergy, around him.

Now, in this year of grace 1807, there was no man living who was a better authority on this topic, than the hero of these pages. And, what is more, there was no living being, who had a tenderer sympathy with the wants and the wailings of the meanest fellow-creature; be it a skylark, or be it a ploughboy.

And the tinkers, and the tailors, solemnly going to work with new patches, the only end of which must be the further enslavement and degradation of the poor; and the end of which could not possibly be the healing of their stomachs, or the mending of their breeches and their gowns; he now bursts out,—

"I, for my part, should not be at all surprised, if some one were to propose the selling of the poor, or the mortgaging of them to the fund-holders. Ay! you may wince; you may cry Jacobin and Leveller as long as you please. I WISH TO SEE THE POOR MEN OF ENGLAND WHAT THE POOR MEN OF ENGLAND WERE WHEN I WAS BORN; AND FROM ENDEAVOURING TO ACCOMPLISH THIS WISH NOTHING BUT THE WANT OF MEANS SHALL MAKE ME DESIST."

Mr. Whitbread's Poor Law Bills[1] of 1807 were

[1] Samuel Whitbread (1758—1815) had entered Parliament in

the present occasion of the subject being before the public.

The income-tax was ten per cent., and the quartern loaf averaged eleven-pence, at this period; whilst the wages of the rural labourer were so low, that the parish universally supplemented them in the form of relief. This practice, indeed, had become such an abuse, that the farmer would refuse to employ men at fair wages—throw them upon the workhouse,—and then take their labour upon the reduced scale paid out of the rates; thus entailing upon his neighbours a share of the expenses of his own establishment. In many parishes *every* labourer was a pauper.

At the same time, capitalists and stockjobbers were amassing wealth, in an unprecedented degree; whilst more than a million sterling, annually, was diverted from the public resources, into the pockets of sinecurists. All the idleness and luxury, thus created, helped to augment the price of the necessaries of life; and the inevitable consequences of unproductive expenditure ensued, in a continued diminution of the resources of those persons who earned their living.

And what was the *bolus*, proposed to be applied

1790, and became an adherent of Mr. Fox, after whose death he was one of the principal leaders of opposition. A genuine philanthropist, guided by deep religious impressions, he spent a large portion of his wealth in endeavouring to ameliorate the condition of the poor, in and around his Bedfordshire estates.

for the cure of this alarming cancer? *Educate the children of the poor!* Positively! As though the children of the poor (at least, of the rural poor) did not pick up their education day by day, from the moment that they could crawl out into the fields to scare away the rooks; as though ploughing, mowing, threshing, and reaping,—loading a waggon, and guiding a team, could not be better acquired, on the old lines, than by having the unreceptive bucolic brain first gorged with reading, writing, and arithmetic! And this new reforming agency, mark you, was to be a further expense to the rate-payers; already at their wits' end to know how, themselves, to keep the wolf from the door. Is it any wonder, then, that persons who, like Mr. Cobbett, not only knew the real wants and temptations, and difficulties of the labourer, raised their voices indignantly?

That it should be imputed to the poor, that it was their IGNORANCE and VICE which had brought them low: that any other cause, but the increase of luxurious idlers, and the draining of the national resources by exorbitant taxation, could lie at the root of the evil: that a generation of plutocrats should have grown up, who looked upon the "lower orders" as of less consequence than their horses, their dogs, and their poultry, was not to be borne in silence, whilst the pen of a ready writer was at hand to defy such thoughtless misrepresentation.

From this time, then, until the period of his death, Cobbett's voice was raised on behalf of the suffering Labouring Classes of England. An adequate return for their labour, and some respect toward them as fellow-creatures, he was determined to get; and he would suffer no opposition, no ignominy, to hinder his endeavours.

But, what was his own practice; and what was the condition of the labourers in his own service?

Precisely that, which could alone render them independent and prosperous. He would have no paupers; and, although they were, generally, married men with families, no one was allowed to remain in his service who required parish assistance. As he gave high wages, and provided them with a free dwelling, the need of this stipulation is obvious. But, they had to work for it all: Mr. Cobbett would have a day's work for a day's pay; and so have no obligation left, on either side, when they came to eventide. Men might be independent, and they might be saucy, too; but better these, a thousand times, than cringing hypocrisy,—than the enslavement of idleness at starvation-pay.

Not only this: Mr. Cobbett's was a measure full and running over;—

"My house was always open to give them victuals and drink whenever they happened to come to it, and to

supply them with little things necessary to them in case of illness; and in case of illness their wages always went on just as if they had been well."

Seventy years will pass away, and carry off with them most direct evidence, leaving little beyond shadowy traditions. But there are, yet living at Botley, aged persons who were long in Mr. Cobbett's service, as gardeners and farm-labourers. And these persons, one and all, represent his days at Botley as a time of exceptional comfort and well-being; and his service as one of well-paid, hard-working earnestness. Hated and envied by some of his neighbours, he was maligned, and abused, and misrepresented, as earnest people always are;[2] but there were a far greater number,

[2] On one occasion, in the summer of 1809, there was a grand field-day over "Cobbett, the Oppressor of the Poor," &c., &c. A boy in his service had absconded, after having received his wages beforehand; and, being brought before the magistrates at Winchester, was sent to prison for a week. But, through some informality on the part of the constable who arrested him, the relatives of the boy were induced to bring an action against Cobbett, the constable, and another local officer, the damages being laid at one thousand pounds! The papers were, instantly, full of the affair; several columns appeared in the *Post*, to the exclusion of important war news; Gillray had a picture of the oppressor thrashing the naked boy tied to a post; women of fashion came to see the poor creature in prison. The three defendants had to pay ten pounds between them; and the fact of *a conviction* was sufficient for exulting detractors. The boy afterwards admitted, however, that he ran away from Mr. Cobbett's because he had to get up as early as his master.

"In private life Mr. Cobbett is an exceedingly pleasant companion, and an excellent husband and father. It has been asserted

who welcomed the current of joy, and freedom, to which he had given rise. And the recollection of his name will still restore a transient smile to the withered features of a man, whose lengthened span of life may be due, in great measure, to the habits of industry and thrift and independence acquired in the service of William Cobbett.

that he is harsh to those who are in his service, but this appears to me to be a calumny. That he expects his labourers to perform their duty is certain, and in this he is truly their friend. Industrious himself, he hates idleness in others. But he is willing to pay them liberally, and to contribute to their happiness. I have been more than once at Botley, and must say that I have never anywhere seen such excellent cottages, gardens, and other comforts appropriated to the labouring class as those which he erected and laid out on his estate."—(From "Public Characters of All Nations," Sir R. Phillips, Lond., 1823).

Alexander Somerville once met with a former Botley servant of Cobbett's, who declared that he "would never wish to serve a better master." ("The Whistler at the Plough," p. 263, Lond., 1852).

CHAPTER XVI.

"THEY NATURALLY HATE ME."

THERE was a Mr. Homan, M.P., a friend of Sheridan's, and a defender of his reputation, who came down to the House of Commons, one day in the Session of 1807, and announced that a friend of his had just called upon Mr. Cobbett, at Botley; and found him living in a "pig-stye." Now, this gentle sally, on the part of a jocular senator, may be selected (out of many, more or less serious) in order to indicate the prominent place now occupied by Cobbett in men's minds. Addressing with familiarity the leading characters of the day, (always in the first-person-singular, be it remembered), he is herding with, and advocating the cause of, the lowest of the low. Occupied with such vulgar pursuits as gardening and planting, and tending dogs and pigs, he is actually daring to instruct and to lead the successors of Burke and of Pitt. One of the "swinish multitude" is here, having poked his nose through the crowd, strutting

along cheek-by-jowl with cabinet ministers, and positively claiming a share of the foot-way!

The worst of it all is, that this presumptuous fellow is not in the wrong. Nobody can convict him of a misstatement of facts; no one can answer his arguments; no one can match his brilliant language. Yet, people won't leave him alone: they will put their pop-guns into range; they will throw dirt, unmindful of the consequences of handling dirt. And, these failing,—as the passionate schoolboy, unable to wreak his vengeance openly, for just castigation, sneaks;—they sneak. They watch his footsteps, if so he can be tripped-up.

But the intended victim learns wariness as he proceeds. Who should be tripped-up, that plants one foot securely before the other is raised? that gives chapter-and-verse for his facts? that dreads no bogy whatsoever? and who still wants to know so many interesting little secrets, which he has a perfect right to know, and which he is determined to know?

Several opposition papers had already been tried, previously to this date. The Addington ministry set up *The Pilot*, and the *Royal Standard;* but these soon died

"Unwept, unhonour'd, and unsung,"

and are, probably, only rescued from utter oblivion

by this sternly-truthful page. An imitation *Register*, edited by Mr. REDHEAD YORKE,[1] had a longer lease of life;—known as *Yorke's Weekly Political Review*, the first number appeared in November, 1805, and ran to several volumes. But it never attained to any authority. *Flower's Political Review and Monthly Register*, printed at Harlow, lasted several years. This journal gave a mild sort of support to reform, without extravagance of tone; and reprinted, from time to time, such works as "Locke on Government," and Bolingbroke's "Patriot King."

Later on, appeared the *National Register*, with the openly-avowed object of producing "candid, but intrepid strictures" upon Mr. Cobbett and the political pamphleteers. And in 1809, a very grand show was made, in the prospectus of BLAGDON'S *Weekly Political Register*:—

"This new political paper will be printed in the same manner as COBBETT'S REGISTER.

"In every number will be inserted an exposition of the daring libels and audacious falsehoods promulgated by COBBETT.

"All who are acquainted with the paper of COBBETT, may perfectly understand the nature of the one here proposed, &c., &c.

[1] Mr. H. Redhead Yorke was a barrister with a love for politics and some ability in political disquisition. He had been imprisoned in York Castle, on account of his writings, in 1794; but had now, in maturer years, become more "loyal."

"The history of the political life and writings of WILLIAM COBBETT will be commenced in the first number, and continued every week, till concluded."

Such a very funny prospectus: such a marvel of self-sufficiency, ignorance, and malignity: really should have been supported better. But, no! people didn't want to be told afresh, that misgovernment ought to be hushed up for the sake of great reputations; and Mr. Blagdon disappeared, along with all the other political dolphins, that must need display their back-fins for one transient moment, with no other end than to whet curiosity or excite wonder.

Some of the pamphlets fared better. But then, they were freely distributed by the agents of Government. The story of the Court-Martial, published in 1809, was understood to be an open effort, on the part of ministers and their adherents, to damage the honour of Mr. Cobbett: indeed, it could not have been otherwise, seeing the amount of official matter which the thing contained.[2] Besides a half-crown edition, it was issued in a cheap form for distribution.

Then there was "Cobbett Convicted, and the

[2] Brougham, in his partial way, thought the business "much against him," and insinuated that the story might have been made to look worse. *Vide* "Memoirs," i. 437.

The *British Critic*, doing penance for its former sins, says, "This is merely a report of certain facts, which it has appeared useful to bring forward at this time," &c.

Revolutionist Exposed:" a task of no great difficulty, of course,—seeing that it was "The Parliamentary Reformer" brought face to face with old "Peter Porcupine," the hater of demagogues and the denouncer of revolution. A kindred publication was "Elements of Reform," sold at sixpence, and largely distributed amongst the people; so that they might see for themselves how excessively wrong, how truly inconsistent, it was, for any person to change his opinions when he got older and wiser.

One of the most curious evidences of the spirit of persecution, which was abroad among ministerialists, is furnished by Lord Colchester, under date May 7th, 1809.[3] He was at that time "Mr. Speaker," and was walking home after church with Mr. Perceval. The latter, communicating his thoughts on various topics, at last comes to Cobbett:—

"He thought Cobbett had at last committed himself in his paper upon the House of Commons' vote (for rejecting Lord Folkestone's motion for a Committee to inquire into the sale of all places in the State, &c.), but, when he showed me the paper, it did not so strike me that the libel was more violent than what all the opposition papers contained every day; nor was it such as could usefully be proceeded upon."

What Mr. Cobbett had said, you will find in the

[3] "Diary and Correspondence," ii. 183.

Register of the previous day. And, if you think that the word "libellous" applies to his remarks, you have leave to bring a charge of assault and battery against that man, who has violated the sanctity of your mouth, in withdrawing therefrom the tooth which distressed you, and which embittered your existence.

The foregoing notes, somewhat anticipatory in point of time, will enable the reader to understand the danger which was now attending Mr. Cobbett's footsteps. He was running the gauntlet of all those who had anything to fear from too much light; and they naturally hated him. Not that he was alone: the Reformists were increasing in number. But Mr. Cobbett was the most daring of the lot; inspiring all the rest with pluck and animation. Even in the House of Commons, the division lists showed how a feeling of shame was growing upon a greater number of its members. As early as 1807, a Reversion Bill passed the Commons, the object of which was to prevent the future granting of sinecure places *two or three deep;* this was, however, thrown out in the Lords.

And all this did not interrupt the joys down in Hampshire:—

". . . . I have the finest melons, Indian corn, and Carolina beans that ever were seen."

"We are just setting out to meet Mr. Bagshaw,[4] and as a proof of our having anticipated your hopes about amusing him, we have made all the preparations for taking him with us to Morn Hill Fair to-morrow, which is upon the heights above Winchester, and which is the greatest fair, for one day, that is known in England. There are several scores of acres of ground covered over with bacon, cheese, hops, leather, &c. About Wednesday he will go to Portsmouth."

"I hope soon to send hares to everybody. I have killed some, and have, as usual, given them away. I take my young bitch to Everley, where she is to run a match that Dr. Mitford has made; but I shall leave betting and matches to others, though I cannot say but I should like to see my dogs win."[5]

[4] The well-known newsman of Bow Street, Covent Garden. He had been the publisher of the *Register* since its commencement.

[5] Here are reminiscences of Everley, written nearly twenty years after:—

"Not far above Amesbury is a little village called Netheravon, where I once saw *an acre of hares*. We were coursing at Everley, a few miles off, and one of the party happening to say that he had seen *an acre of hares* at Mr. Hicks-Beach's at Netheravon, we who wanted to see the same, or to detect our informant, sent a messenger to beg a day's coursing, which being granted, we went over the next day. Mr. Beach received us very politely. He took us into a wheat stubble close to his paddock; his son took a gallop round, cracking his whip at the same time; the hares (which were very thickly in sight before) started all over the field, ran into a flock like sheep, and we all agreed that the flock did cover an acre of ground."

"This is the most famous place in all England for coursing. I was here, at this very inn, with a party eighteen years ago; and the landlord, who is still the same, recognized me as soon as he saw me. There were forty brace of greyhounds taken out into the field on one of the days, and every brace had one course, and some of them *two*. The ground is the finest in the world: from two to three miles for

ARY,
Foot Town Street, E. R.

"Hares and post-offices do not congregate together, I find. There is none of the latter nearer to Everley than this place [Andover, November, 1807]. . . . I am now starting for Everley with Nancy, Mrs. Cobbett having declined the trip. She will go to Dr. Mitford's. I saw William at Winchester, who is grown very much, and who behaved just as a son of mine ought to behave. So cleanly, so orderly, so attentive, so punctual, and so manly, just as I was at his age; I hope the qualities will be more durable with him."

". . . . Almost all the money I draw is expended in preparations for planting, and in making a new footpath along the side of my farm, in order to stop up the one that passes through it, and which is an injury to the estate. These pecuniary pinches give me great uneasiness, at times; but they will cease before it be long; and if it please God to preserve my life, they will cease much about the time that my grand planting scheme will be actually completed. There is here a little coppice, which I think will be to be sold; and which I intend you shall have. . . . I am very desirous that you should have an inch of land that you might set your foot upon, and say, 'this is mine.' But pray never talk to any one about these matters."

the hare to run to cover, and not a stone, nor a bush, nor a hillock. It was here proved to me that the hare is by far the swiftest of all English animals; for I saw three hares in one day *run away* from the dogs. To give dog and hare a fair trial, there should be but *one* dog; then, if that dog got so close as to compel the hare *to turn*, that would be a proof that the dog ran fastest. When the dog, or dogs, never get near enough to the hare to induce her to turn, she is said, and very justly, to run away from them; and, as I saw three hares do this in one day, I conclude that the hare is the swifter animal of the two."

Mr. Wright is particularly requested not to lend the little mare, but to make use of it himself:—

"I hope you ride a good deal. I wish to God you would rise early. It is the finest thing in the world for health. I am in my coppice by six o'clock in the morning; but then, I am in bed by ten at latest."

The following occurs, as a postscript, on the back of a letter to Wright:—

"My dear little James,—your little dog is very well, and the rabbits are in their new house. God bless you. —Wm. C."

An old acquaintance turns up, one day in the spring of 1808:—

"This day the most wonderful thing, which I have met with in my whole wonderful life, has happened to me. A gentleman came to me this morning from London, to show me, and to consult me upon, the publication of a work upon *Metaphysicks*. He appeared to be a very learned and very accomplished man, and so I find him, upon some hours of conversation; and, would you believe it, he then discovered himself to me; and I found him to be the same whom I left in England, twenty-three years ago, a fifer, in the recruiting party that I belonged to! This has occupied me the whole day. He was about two years younger than myself, and I have thought and talked of him ten thousand times, having had a most affectionate regard for him. . . . You shall see my old acquaintance when I get to town."

The letters of this period are filled with cautions, that every means be taken to avoid occasion of real offence. "Copy" for the *Register* is to be carefully scanned, and communications from sympathizing correspondents are to be softened in their tone, before committal to the printer. Some of these latter are far too plain-spoken. An awakened public opinion, too liable to rush to extremes, must be kept within proper limits, as regards its expression. There is no disposition to go to jail for the sake of brilliant periods and caustic paragraphs. The "villains" could be lashed vigorously enough without any need of departing from facts.

Questions of libel were by no means infrequent, during these years. And, with Lord Ellenborough's severe opinions on that topic, there was plenty of reason to fear any conflict with authority. An action brought by an offended author against Messrs. Hood and Sharpe, in July 1808, for a skit upon a certain book of travels, brought Mr. Cobbett forward, in several letters upon the subject of libel law; in which he pointed out very clearly, that principles had retrograded since the days of Pope and Swift, who certainly had no idea that to write and publish truth was any crime:—

"The whole tenor of their works proves, that, so long as they confined themselves to the stating of what was *true*, they entertained no apprehensions as to the consequences. . . . They were afraid of no constructive libels;

nor, if they chose to express their disapprobation of the conduct of kings and princes, did they fear the accusation of *disloyalty*. And what would they have said, had they been told that, in their country, it would become a crime to wound men's feelings by holding them up to ridicule? Ridicule is a thing that will not attach *where it ought not*," &c., &c.

His own idea (which, however, he did not always put into practice) was to live it down; and, as for calumny, he had advised Mr. Paull, and he had so advised others, to let falsehood come to the inevitable over-reaching of itself.

As for caricatures,—

"Caricatures are things to laugh at. They break no bones. I, for instance, have been represented as a bull-dog, as a porcupine, as a wolf, as a sans-culotte, as a nightman, as a bear, as a kite, as a cur; and, in America, as hanging upon a gallows. Yet, here I am, just as sound as if no misrepresentation of me had ever been made."

This was no idle boast. The Anti-Cobbett squibs and caricatures were a standing source of amusement, even with the little boys and girls, at Botley house. The articles, above alluded to, had produced a fresh crop. He writes to Mr. Wright upon "our friends the satirists:"—

"They seem half-distracted. How angry they are, that I did not take notice of what they said of myself! All those who know anything of me, know their assertions

or insinuations to be false; and, as to those who know nothing of me, they are of no consequence to me, or to anybody else."

But, the jealousy of the press was beyond everything.[6] Unfairness and malignity marked all references to Cobbett, who was really doing them better service than any one individual, beside, could be credited with. It is true, he never spared his cotemporaries, when in fight; but let them be for a moment in trouble, and his shield was at once raised, by his proclamation of the Liberty of the

[6] The first genuine piece of criticism upon Cobbett's writings, which had any real talent, was an article by Francis Jeffery in the *Edinburgh Review* for July, 1807. But it had the same conspicuous failure which attended all partisan writers, and Whigs above all, in their efforts to define political consistency.

This article furnished the material out of which all subsequent attacks upon Cobbett's alleged "tergiversation" would seem to have been founded. While, however, there was abundant material for comparison, there was no impugning the justness of his reasons for a change of views; nor, indeed, was any attempt made to do so. Both Jeffery and his copiers studiously avoided arguing out Cobbett's conclusions. It was all-sufficient, in the eye of a party writer, to wreck a man's reputation who had once openly forsaken a cause.

And yet, the reviewer, near the opening of his article, says the *Register* "can only be acceptable to men of some vigour of intellect, and some independence of principle." That was the very root of the matter. Imagine the *Edinburgh* of that day being acceptable to men of any independence of principle! The very number in question has an article on Catholic Relief, which not only contains sentiments differing from Jeffery's, but the very opposite to those enunciated by the same review only three years before.

But there was one leading difference between the Whig writer and Mr. Cobbett—they were place-hunters and he was not, and no awkward "comparisons" could wipe out this notorious fact.

Press; and of his doctrine that there was nothing so mean, "nor so truly detestable," as that of seeking, through the law, vengeance for a literary defeat. No such generosity, however, could be remembered in the midst of party fights; and, even where there was real ability and talent, as with the *Morning Chronicle* under James Perry, newspaper polemics of that day were marked by misrepresentation and abuse.

The inquiry into the conduct of the Duke of York, brought about by the discovery of corrupt influence in the disposal of promotions, &c., kept society amused for several months, during the year 1809; and, indeed, threw everything else into the shade, not excepting the new tide of affairs in the Peninsula. Mr. Cobbett was in the front, as might have been expected.

The circumstances were these. The Duke of York had now been the Commander-in-Chief for several years, to the great benefit of the service. It was generally acknowledged that increased efficiency and discipline had been introduced into the army since his appointment. Yet, whispers had begun to be circulated, conveying grave insinuations against his Royal Highness; and there were those who openly predicted his speedy dismissal.

All this was, however, treated by "the loyal"

as wicked conspiracy, libel, Jacobinism, and so forth. And the Duke might have escaped exposure, had it not been for a brave Irishman, who ventured upon publishing his grievances,[7] and risking the inevitable dangers. As it happened, Major Hogan's pamphlet came just in the nick of time, gave the Duke's enemies an opportunity, and the Reformists a grievance. Here is Mr. Cobbett's first short reference, directing public attention to it:—

"This, I scruple not to say, is the most interesting publication that has appeared in England for many years. It should be read by every individual in the nation. Oh, what a story does this gentleman tell! What a picture does he exhibit! What facts does he unfold! If *this* produce no effect upon the public, why, then, we are so base and rascally a crew, that it is no matter what becomes of us. We are unworthy of the name of men, and are beneath the beasts that perish."

The facts being, in short, that Major Hogan found he could get the promotion he wanted by paying 500*l.* to the Duke's mistress, Mrs. Clarke; after he had waited long and hopelessly for it, on direct application to the Duke himself.

There was some hesitation in accepting Major

[7] "An Appeal to the Public and a Farewell Address to the British Army, by Brevet-Major Hogan, who Resigned his Commission in consequence of the Treatment he experienced from the Duke of York, and of the System that prevails in the Army respecting Promotion" (London, 1808).

Hogan's statement; meanwhile, Finnerty, who had edited the pamphlet, and the publisher, Bagshaw, were prosecuted. Mr. Cobbett, himself, thought the story far too gross to be true,—that a "peculating pimp," (as he called her), had gone round to the major's hotel with hush-money: had been refused: and that such doubtful personage could be no other than the artful mistress of the Prince. However, light came upon the matter from another quarter, which laid the whole thing before the public gaze; and, in the end, caused the temporary retirement of the Duke from his office.

Mr. Gwyllym Lloyd Wardle[8] was the agent of inquiry. He brought the matter before the House of Commons, in January, 1809, supported by several clear instances; in which it was shown that Mrs. Clarke was having a large share in the patronage of the War Office, and was making a good deal of money over it; besides, that several clergymen owed their advancement to her. So,

[8] Mr. Wardle was a man of fortune, a native of Cheshire, who had served in Ireland during the rebellion; he entered Parliament, as Member for Oakhampton, in the year 1807. This affair of the Duke of York brought him vast popularity.

Francis Place says that Colonel Wardle was a weak and timid man, without the capacity to estimate either his own powers or resources, and that, had he foreseen the trouble and vexation his motion would have occasioned him, he would not have made it. Mr. Brooks (another Westminster politician) raised a subscription of 4000*l.* for Wardle. (See Place MSS. in the British Museum (Addl. 27,850).

there was a Committee of the whole House; many witnesses were examined,—

"Thais led the way,—"

and the faithful Commons could attend to nothing whilst this was going on. Corunna faded into insignificance, and became a mocking sound; and no one seemed to think that the war was of any consequence, until this interesting affair was disposed of.[9]

The upshot of all was, that the Duke of York was exculpated from any guilty participation in these malpractices; but he at once resigned the office of commander-in-chief, and dismissed the author of his troubles.

Colonel Wardle was publicly thanked for his disinterested service, in all the principal towns in the kingdom. He did not escape malignity however; and his popularity on the one hand was balanced by persecution on the other, headed by Mrs. Clarke herself. After the lapse of a year or so, she produced a very naughty, brazen-faced book, under the title of "The Rival Princes;"[1]

[9] The details of this inquiry are accessible, in the *Annual Register* of the year; and Lord Colchester's Diary, vol. ii., gives some outline of the plans of Ministers concerning the Duke's defence. Cobbett's *Register* was, of course, very entertaining over the matter.

[1] "The Rival Princes; or, A Faithful Narrative of Facts relating to Mrs. M. A. Clarke's Political Acquaintance with Colonel Wardle, Major Dodd, &c., &c., who were concerned in the Charges against the Duke of York." 2 vols., London, 1810.

in which most of the gentlemen who had aided in exposing her were more or less libelled. It was a book that could only have been produced by a courtesan, and it, probably, did not do any harm either to Colonel Wardle, or to any of those whose names were involved. Mr. Cobbett's name appears in it, as having been incited to anger against the Duke, on account of the latter having thought it prudent not to receive Cobbett at dinner, as an opposition writer. Mr. Cobbett thereupon informed his public that he had been introduced to Mrs. Clarke, and was invited to dine with her; but that his wife disapproved of any such questionable acquaintance, and he didn't go.[2]

It is exceedingly probable that the Royal Family were getting offended with Mr. Cobbett, in spite of his professions of loyalty to the constitution, and his really affectionate references to the king; and it would surprise no one, at this

[2] This book brought out a good deal of humour and some imitations. One which will interest us is, "The Rival Impostors; or, Two Political Epistles to two Political Cheats. The first addressed to G. L. Wardle, Esq., M.P.; and the second to William Cobbett, &c., &c." The latter's share was an "Analysis" of the Court Martial. The argument is worthless, and the language fearfully gross. Here is a mild specimen:—

"Now blush, thou unparalleled liar![*] if not at thy wickedness," &c., &c.

[*] "Gentle reader, pardon this coarse expression; none other in the English language is sufficiently strong to express my horror and contempt of the miscreant to whom it is applied."

distance of time, to learn that the Prince of Wales and Mr. Perceval were putting their heads together with a view to silencing him. That which brought Mr. Cobbett into the one great trouble of his life happened soon after the above-mentioned events.

CHAPTER XVII.

"THE OUTCRY AGAINST ME IS LOUDER THAN EVER."

THE little estate, which was being formed on the banks of the Hamble, was now beginning to wear a face of its own, in the spring of 1808. The consolidation of two or three small farms, and the replanting of a large portion of the ground, with oak, thorn, ash, acacia, &c., was the outline of a plan, which now showed some promise of a return. Mr. Cobbett's favourite notion had been, that a fair provision for his family might be thus made. And now, after three full seasons, the new plantations had entirely fulfilled the expectation.[1] They were

[1] This enterprise attracted the notice of the Surveyor to the Board of Agriculture:—"Mr. Cobbett has been most particularly fortunate in raising, chiefly from seed, a vast nursery of almost all the different sorts of forest trees known on the Atlantic side of the middle states of North America. The vast variety of strong and flourishing plants which his seed-bed of oaks exhibited in the course of the last summer bids fair to render his success on this occasion of much importance to our country," &c., &c. *Vide* Vancouver's "Agricultural Survey of Hampshire," 1808.

flourishing and healthy, and a large supply of material for the London stick-makers appears as part of this year's cropping. In May, there is another large parcel of land added, containing sixty-seven acres of wood, besides arable land and water-meadow.

All this makes the need of any visit to London still more irksome; and Mr. Wright has to do the honours for his leader. There is talk of a grand demonstration at Westminster, to celebrate the anniversary of Burdett's election; but Mr. Cobbett doesn't care to be dragged away from his beloved fields into "the cursed smoke," as he calls it:—

". . . . Go to the committee by all means. Let us suffer no little slights to interfere with our public duty. That is the way with those only who are actuated by selfish motives. I shall be in town on Thursday night next, or on Saturday night. . . . . If I find all to be good men and true, we will make such a stir as has not for sometime been made. All the gentlemen whom I meet with, are loud in Sir Francis Burdett's praise. The motion about the cashiering of offices has gained him thousands of valuable friends. So bent was I upon calling for a purgation of that d— House, that I was resolved to petition alone, if any one would have presented my petition. The nation is heart-sick of it. It is impossible for both factions united to calumniate our motives, if we proceed as we ought, and do not mix with men of bad character. There is one Hunt,[2] the Bristol man.

[2] *I.e.* Henry Hunt, who had recently entered into public life,

Beware of him. He rides about the country with a * * the wife of another man, having deserted his own. A sad fellow! Nothing to do with him.

"P.S.—I will write to Sir J. Astley. I am very sorry for his misfortune indeed. I want very much to see some man who has planted upon a large scale. Cutting upon a large scale is the order of the day here."

". . . . Now, as to the dinner, it is dreadfully distressing for me to go; for, the season being so backward, has thrown the oak-cutting into this week and the two succeeding ones, and you will easily guess how necessary my personal attendance is, while it lasts. Yet I will go, if alive and well; but I must go up on the Sunday, and come back on the Tuesday, for I cannot be longer absent. I have many reasons for going as well as for staying; but the former prevail.

"I have not sold my second lot of timber that I had marked while I was in London. When I come to see it again, and to consider that the 300 that would have sold for a thousand pounds were gaining in growth above 150*l.* a year, I could not bring myself to commit such flagrant murder of property. The new purchase has upon it about 6000 trees, that now cost me from a shilling to two-and-sixpence apiece, and that in twenty years' time will be worth 3*l.* apiece, at the very least. This, I think, is the best way of insuring a fortune for children."

"Only the day before yesterday, I was bent upon going to town for the 23rd, and had written to Mr. H—— of Fontington, to meet me there about the farm. But now

with an address to the electors of Wilts. This note (dated 10th April) got Mr. Cobbett into trouble many years after, when he had long forgotten this his first impression of Hunt, and dreamed not of the possibility of such old confidences ever seeing the light of day.

I find that it cannot be, without an inconvenience and risk which, I am sure, no friend would wish me to incur, especially as my journey would produce little more than my own gratification at witnessing the assemblage of so many public-spirited men. You know very well that this is my harvest, and that this year I have a tenfold harvest. I allude to the oak-tree cutting, which must be done while the sap is in the flood of its spring, or not at all; and the bark, you will observe, is of the little thinners that I am cutting upon my own account, worth three times as much as the timber. In the average of years, this sap season lasts a good month; but the very extraordinary backwardness of this spring, and the very rare hot weather that has come on after it, has made the season last only three weeks, a fortnight of which has already passed. Owing to this, I, who waited till the several companies of fellers had finished the great timber, am obliged to fall to work on Saturday, instead of waiting till next Tuesday. I am compelled to set sixty men on at once, and as mine is a work of thinning, it will require my constant attendance from the time the men begin till they leave off. I must be with them to mark the trees; to see the effect of taking out some, before we take out others; and, in short, the health and growth, as well as the future beauty, of 100 acres of the finest woods in England depend upon my personal attendance between Saturday and Wednesday next. Nothing ever was more pointedly perverse; but I trust that all those who wished me to attend the dinner will be convinced that I ought not to leave home at this time.

"I am of opinion, too (and I should like to hear what the Major says of the matter), that I am of most weight as a *spectator* and *comment-maker*. This way my word

and opinion pass for a good deal; but I am not clear that whatever good I could do as an *agitator*, would not be more than counterbalanced by the loss of weight in the other character. I know it is the opinion of Sir Francis, that to put me in parliament would be to lessen my weight; and, really, I think that the same reasoning will apply to the other case. In fact, we cannot *act* and *write* too, with so much advantage. The way in which I am most able to aid the cause of the country is to sit quietly here, and give my sincere and unbiased opinions upon all that passes which appears worthy of particular notice.

"In the copy last sent you, there is the phrase '*old* G. Rose.' Upon second thoughts, it may as well be left out. It is, perhaps, right to cease to use that, and the like phrases. One puts them down under the influence of indignant feelings, but they probably do more harm than good."

Although he does not go up to the festival at the "Crown and Anchor," Mr. Cobbett does justice to the opportunity as a "comment-maker." In supporting Burdett's views, as expressed at the meeting, he remarks :—

"I am persuaded that if the nation were polled, leaving out those who have an interest in corruption, there would appear a majority of a thousand to one in favour of the reform, which he recommends, and which, in their better days, had been recommended by Mr. Pitt and Mr. Wilberforce. . . . A minister may desire to do that which is for the good of the country; he may have an anxious desire to promote its happiness (and, his errors aside, I

do think that Mr. Perceval is such a man); but, before he can stir an inch, he has the feelings and interests of the borough-mongers to consult; he has party to counteract, and faction to mollify. How much more at his ease must such a man feel: what a load would be removed from his mind, if he could step into a House of Commons freely chosen, and having no object in view but that of agreeing to what they thought good, and opposing what they thought bad! A House of Commons in which there would be no strife for office or emolument, and in which, nine times out of ten, truth would prevail."

There is an excursion to Cornwall, in August, on occasion of the trial of Sir Christopher Hawkins and others, at Penrhyn, for corrupt practices at a past election. The electors of Westminster are forthwith treated to a new lecture, upon the prevalence of the "vile traffic" in seats; and Mr. Wright is favoured with an account of the aspect of things and people as they appear from behind the scenes. One remark is interesting: "Notwithstanding all I have said about the lawyers lately, the whole of them have treated me with distinguished civility."

The following, dated 17th September, 1808, is worth preserving, as upon a subject concerning which Mr. Cobbett had some real practical knowledge:—

"The essay upon planting, which you sent me some time ago, is very well done, and is particularly interesting

to me. It establishes, from experience, what I had before made up my mind to, in theory. Certainly, there is no way in which the very best lands are to be employed to so much ultimate advantage. If your friend should be actually about planting himself, my experiments, in a year or two, may be of great use to him. Of two things, however, I can now speak with positive certainty; viz., that to obtain quick produce, the trees planted should be small; deciduous trees from the seed-bed, and firs not above a foot or eighteen inches high. And, that all deciduous trees, of whatever size, should be, after planting, cut down to the ground. Last year (March, 1807), I planted ten planes, about eight feet high. Some of them shot very well, others not, their tops dying, and the new shoots breaking out some distance from the branches. One of them, in the month of May, 1807, we thought was dead; but my man, thinking that there was some life in the root, cut it off within two inches of the ground. . . . This tree is now twelve feet high, a beautiful straight stem, with proper side-branches, while the highest of the others (with heads too large for their bodies) is not more than ten feet high. I have proved the same with all sorts of deciduous trees. Those who want, quickly, fine plantations about their houses, should plant and cut down to the ground; and of course those should do it who plant for profit. If this were done, you would not see so many acres of poor, sickly, dead-topped things, called shrubberies, about new-built houses. A tree planted large, and its head left on, is a continual eyesore, until it be rooted up. I transplanted some American walnuts last March; they were three feet high in the seed-bed. Some I cut down before I planted them, the rest not; and the former are now as high as the latter, with fine

straight stems, while the others are top-heavy, and must be cut down at last, in order to make them grow freely. . . .

"The rascals in Portugal have made a pretty mess of it! To be sure, one cannot say how they have been criminal; but to me it appears that both our admiral and our general ought to be hanged. . . ."

This last paragraph refers to the convention at Cintra, by which the French army was permitted to retire from Portugal in British ships. This advantage, granted to the ubiquitous enemy, caused a great popular outcry in England. The Hampshire people had a grand demonstration at Winchester, in November; in which occasion Mr. Cobbett took a prominent part.

Another useful scheme is now in preparation. In his reading, necessitated by the production of the "Parliamentary History," Mr. Cobbett had found the need of an accessible edition of the State Trials; and he resolved to supply the want by reproducing them, with additional matter, in the belief that other students of history would find it of advantage. Mr. Wright entered warmly into the notion, and procured the services of a gentleman to act as editor. This was Thomas Bayly Howell, whose name has sometimes been associated with the work.[3] But there seems to have early arisen

[3] Mr. Howell was a barrister, and a very fair lawyer, but had no taste for practice at the bar. He pursued this task with the State

some dissatisfaction with him, and the engagement went very near to be cancelled. The following has the first of several references to this matter:—

"Enclosed is a letter for you to read, and then send. I cannot consent to a partnership. Upon reading my letter, you will see what difficulties it must lead to. Only think of having another person invested with a right, a legal right, to make us account,—*us*, whose accounts the devil himself would never unravel. I would not take such a weight upon my mind for all the profits of all the books in the universe. No, no: you and I were never made to have our accounts examined by anybody but ourselves. Besides, you know what *all* authors are. They are all impatient for sale. But I need say no more. My letter will adjust everything, I am certain. . . .

". . . I thank you for the caricature. One would suppose that I had given the hint myself, and, indeed, I am afraid the town will say so. But, d—— the town! I care not what it says or thinks of me. . . . We shall have, I think, a blazing meeting at Winchester, and I have written to Finnerty to come down. Mind Deverell. Never say anything to him that you do not wish the world to know. He is a trading politician,—a mere party agent. I have several letters from very respectable men in the county intimating their wish to join me; particularly from Mr. Lowth (a son of Bishop Lowth), a man of great property, and not less respectability. . . .

". . . William writes me a letter every week, copies a

Trials until his death in 1817, after which date it was carried on to completion by his son. It eventually reached thirty-four volumes in royal 8vo. The enterprise passed into the hands of Hansard, about the year 1810.

page of the history of England every day, reads my part of the *Register* every week, and is to get as far as the Rule of Three, complete, by Christmas. He rode from school to Weyhill Fair, and back, in a day; and he frequently rides to Winchester by himself, puts his horse up at the inn, and, when he has done his business, goes off home again. He is not yet ten years old. What a base thing it would be to put such a boy to have outlandish words flogged into him by an old dotard in a big white wig! Why, if you were to put one of these * * * upon a horse, he would fall off into the dirt! I will, if I live, teach William to shave himself, and that will be much more useful to him than Latin and Greek. I think of sending Nancy for a year to the nuns at Winchester, where they teach people to talk French and make puddings."

". . . We have had a good meeting, and Mr. Finnerty[4] will be with you with the account of it, some time early to-morrow. I missed by a mere hair carrying a petition, upon independent grounds, against both parties. . . the Whigs, with their lords and baronets, had been a week preparing their address; mine was done in Finnerty's room, while he was getting his breakfast; and in I went to the hall without knowing any soul on my side but Mr. Smith, Farmer Mears, about ten other yeomen who went to dine with me, and Mr. Baker, who very boldly and well seconded my motions."

[4] Peter Finnerty, whose name occurs several times in these pages, was an Irishman, and had been brought up as a printer. In consequence of a press prosecution in Dublin, he came and settled in London, when he became Parliamentary reporter on the *Morning Chronicle*, and a popular character in the journalistic world. He died in 1816, aged fifty-six, some time after the close of a term of imprisonment for "libel" in Lincoln jail.

". . . I have had letters from all parts of the country beseeching me to persevere. . . ."

Concerning the forthcoming "State Trials:"—

"I must confess that I am less pleased with this thing than I should have been, if it had remained solely in your hands. I very much question whether Mr. H.'s taste is so good as your own; and I am quite sure that we shall derive no comfort from any connexion with an author.

"But it is too late to reflect; we will go on as well as we can. Only mind to be always upon your guard against letting him assume anything like a dictatorial tone. Keep up your own consequence; for I know that your modest merit is not very well calculated to resist the encroachments of conceited importance. . . Be sure to tell him none of our political secrets. Suffer no inquiries into our affairs. Let him see no copy of mine, or my correspondents. Tell him of none of our intentions about anything. I know how easy it is for any one to worm himself into your unsuspecting breast; and, therefore, I give these cautions. I think I perceive, in his letters, a rather consequential air. But I am resolved to have no partner, nor any one to give me advice, except yourself. We have gone on so happily, and so advantageously, by ourselves, that I am really in a state of alarm at the prospect of admitting anything like an associate. It must not be. . . ."

A vacancy in the representation of Hampshire brings another county assemblage at Winchester; on which occasion Mr. Cobbett requires each can-

didate to take a pledge, that, if elected, he would never accept the public money as long as he lived; and would, moreover, use every endeavour to obtain redress of the public grievances, especially that trying one of having their money "voted away by those, amongst whom there are many who receive part of that money."

". . . The meeting at Winchester was very large, and consisted of almost the whole of the people of considerable property. Rose and his son were deterred from appearing at the castle. The speech was infinitely better than the *report*. I made use of no notes, except as far as related to the sums. Not the smallest hesitation from beginning to end; and, owing to the strength of my voice and the clearness of my articulation, every word I said was heard by the man the most distant from me. The effect was very great. I spoke three-quarters of an hour with very little interruption indeed, notwithstanding I spoke to a party assembly, hostile to me, as far as party could influence men. I wish you could have seen how *little* the *great* looked after the speech had been made! They went up to the castle swaggering, and in crowds; they came sneaking back in ones and twos. Many of them had the meanness to compliment me upon my speech. I was invited to dinner by several; but I went to my inn and dined with Mr. Baker, another neighbouring clergyman, and Dr. Mitford, and then set off home.

"No, be in no alarm about my hazarding my reputation and happiness by standing as a candidate for this county, or for any other place. That I never will be. If

any body of electors, anywhere, have a mind to choose me, without giving me any trouble, I will serve; but at this time, I have not the least desire for that; on my own account, I should wish not; but I am, in such a case, not to consider myself only. I feel that I should have power to serve with great effect; and I shall never, I hope, be backward to make any useful sacrifice. But I never will ask anybody to elect me.

"The boys have met me at Winchester sometimes; and it is no bad school for them. While I was speaking, I saw in the crowd several persons from Farnham, whom I had never seen before, since I was their playmate. I saw many to whom I used, when a boy, to make a very low bow. Lord Temple came and shook hands, even after the speech. And I must say that I think Mr. Herbert[5] a very modest young man. In one part of my speech, an attorney of the Rose party, who stood just under the window, made an attempt to excite a clamour; but I fixed my eye upon him, and, pointing my hand downright, and making a sort of chastising motion, said, 'Peace, babbling slave!' which produced such terror amongst others, that I met with no more interruption..."

That Mr. Cobbett was unwilling to join in a cry against a public character, without reason or justice, was often manifest. His entire freedom from party bias, as such, accounts for the frequent distrust which he inspired, at the same time that it helped to keep away from him the temptation to

[5] The Hon. William Herbert, one of the candidates. He afterwards "took the pledge," as far as regarded pensions and sinecures, but would not bind himself to decline the offer of *a place.*

hunt a man down merely because he was an opponent. For example, he did not readily give ear to the charge made against the Duke of York on the part of Major Hogan, although he was, at the very time, raising the question of the Duke's exorbitant income. Mr. Cobbett could be just, and loyal too. This story of Hogan's might suit the tribe of malignant, unreasoning scribblers; but he has no idea of weakening his own writings by an appeal to what looks uncommonly like an invention. The *Register* holds out several warnings to the Major; and Cobbett tells Mr. Wright more plainly that he believes "Major Hogan has certainly told a d—— lie, and ought to be exposed. . . . . As for Hague,[6] he really seems to have courted a jail."

He presently adds:—

"They are fools, however, for touching him. But thus they will go on to the end of the chapter. *Force, force*, that is all their reliance. How much better to do as I do—let slander work itself dead!

". . . Bagshaw's way is to be very quiet: when any one mentions the matter to him, to say that he did as others do, sold the book because it was called for. This prosecution is the very foolishest thing that the Duke of York ever was advised to do. Had he not begun this, Hogan would have gone nearly to whitewash him. . . . . Poor Finnerty! what the devil did he suffer himself to

[6] Author of another attack on the Duke.

be so provoked for? I hope he will not incur a prosecution for Hogan. . . .

"As to Howell, I always was afraid of him. I know that he is what the French call '*un homme à grandes pretensions*;' as, indeed, all your authors are. . . They think that every book that is printed is so much money coined. They take the price, the full retail price, of a volume, say a guinea-and-a-half, then they take the number of copies, and hence they reckon that the bookseller has so many guineas and halves in his drawer, the moment the book is printed. You cannot beat this out of their brains. They will have it so. Then they are full of their college conceit, which is so intolerable. . . . With such people, a partnership would be, for you and me, a most uncomfortable thing. I greatly approve of the scheme of a 'fag;' and as to expense, four guineas a week would be cheap. But he must work and be obedient. . . . I would sooner give an additional guinea a week on the score of *obedience*, than on the score of *talent*: though there must be considerable talent too. If you can get rid of H., I shall be very happy. I know what your college gentlemen are. They always have, and will have, the insolence to think themselves our betters; and our superior talents, and industry, and power, and weight, only excite their envy. I am heartily sorry we ever had anything to do with H. All this may blow off; but I shall never have confidence in him. . . .

"I will write to the major,[7] and to Holt White, upon the subject of the Trials. Two better men there are not in all England. The major is the very best writer that I know, though he has scarcely a drop of blood in his veins. Oh, that my mind, at his age, may be like his!

[7] Cartwright.

"Be sure to send off *Register* to Lord Cochrane, up to this time. He is not come home. And no one can tell when he will. Pray do not neglect this a day. I should like him to see that I did justice to him in this country. He, after all, is the best member for Westminster.

"Nancy will copy the manuscript of which you spoke lately. She copied the whole of the Winchester proceedings, with only three errors."

The dissatisfaction with Mr. Howell would appear to have arisen partly from an extreme slackness in providing "copy;" and, with this, a disposition to consider his own remuneration as of the first importance. The difficulty, however, did blow over.

The following refers to a letter of Major Cartwright's on the affairs of Spain:—

". . . Now, as to the major's letter. Room I am ready to spare him for four or five columns. But, if you have the smallest doubt upon the libel subject, do not put it in. Mark well every word relating to the Parliament. Ferdinand, mind, must not be libelled; and *anything is a libel.* If you can, by leaving out, or altering, or adding, or qualifying, make it quite safe, put the letter in; but not else. . . ."

This one appeared in the *Register*, but with reference to a succeeding letter:—

". . . Upon looking at the major's last letter, page 944, I am induced now to tell you not to put in his letter, if there be the smallest thing doubtful in it. It may suit

him to accuse the judges, and the Attorney-General: *me* it does not. I should be more afraid of that letter than of anything I ever published in my life. They would never touch a hair of *his* head. Therefore, mind!"

The fatal news of Corunna came, and routed up the nation once more, in the course of January. Two of Mrs. Cobbett's brothers were with the forces there, and no tidings had come from them:—

"Mrs. Cobbett and all of us join in best thanks to you for your kindness and anxiety, in which you are never wanting, and which, at this horrible hour, are so peculiarly acceptable and grateful. . . . Poor Palmer! I can easily conceive what he must feel, having myself held a dying son in my arms. Mrs. Cobbett and Ellen, both of whom love their brothers very dearly, are almost bursting with grief and apprehension. Indeed, I feel most sensibly myself. The whole nation will be in mourning."

The two brothers, Tom and Frederick Reid, are safe, however. Little Nancy writes thus to Mr. Wright:—

"DEAR SIR,—My papa being very busy, he has desired me to write to you and thank you for the trouble you have respecting my uncles, and to tell you he went yesterday afternoon in a great hurry to Portsmouth, thinking they might be there, where he met with Colonel Harding, commander of the artillery; who told him that they were gone to Plymouth, and that they were both well at Corunna when he came away, and that they were not in the action, neither have they been much

engaged in active service, as some have. And, indeed, mama and papa feel very much surprised and indignant at not having heard from them at all, knowing that they have been at Corunna almost all the time, and having had so many opportunities (which they must have had) of writing either to papa or mama. Papa is so much vexed, that he says now, if he had known they had been at Corunna all this time, he would not have gone to Portsmouth after them as he did. The colonel, he said, told him, if they came there, he would send them over to Botley directly. While papa was there, he found out some officers of the 10th dragoons: he went directly, and sent in his name by a waiter, and begged to know whether Major Palmer was there, or whether he was safe. Upon hearing their major's name, two or three came to him and told him he was safe at Plymouth, which was good hearing. Mama will be very much obliged to you if you will have the goodness to send her down a box of the biscuits you have gotten several times; they are to be got at the corner of Bond Street, in Piccadilly. She is quite ashamed to trouble you; but a lady, one of the Miss Boxalls, is coming here to stay some time next week, and she never eats bread, always those biscuits; and there are none to be got in Southampton. Mama and papa desire to be very kindly remembered to you. Excuse haste. I remain, &c.,

"ANNE COBBETT."

The very interesting inquiry into the private affairs of the Duke of York was perilous to editors and pamphleteers. Mr. Wright sends word down to Botley of his increasing fears lest his chief should be compromised; and not without reason. The exasperation of ministerialists was at its

height. Their writers brought forth wild imputations against the opposition scribblers, and twisted and tortured their language and their meaning. In vain, however; facts could not be gainsaid, and upon facts alone they relied. The *Examiner* which was then young, got into trouble over Major Hogan; the *Morning Chronicle* was in danger. But nothing could stop the ball which Colonel Wardle had set rolling.

And, just as Mr. Cobbett had hesitated over Major Hogan, he is still as cautious as ever concerning Wardle; and wants to know, first, his correspondent's opinion as to Wardle's capability to bring forward proof of his charges, before entering the lists himself. Yet, the game being started, he laughs away fear; and, acknowledging the kindness of Mr. Wright's expressions of anxiety, he says he "must stand the brunt. No flinching would either be honourable or politic." He will defy prosecution, rather than give up the fight, much as he "loves his fields and woods."

One singular incident of this period is the case of Miss Taylor; a lady who had, unfortunately for herself, to give evidence of her acquaintanceship with Mrs. Clarke. She, with her sister, had kept a school, and the two were earning a respectable livelihood. There was not the slightest ground for tainting her character; but, having to admit, upon a very unnecessary and malicious cross-examina-

tion, that she was not born in wedlock, the fathers and mothers of that moral, that highly-toned age, could not brook the notion of their children being educated by a ——, whatever name offended society chose to give her. Her appearance in the inquiry was the prelude to immediate ruin, for her pupils suddenly vanished; and, as the affair got into the papers, it was felt by some of the new "patriots" that, to some extent, she was a martyr to the cause. So they got up a subscription:[8] Mr. Cobbett leading the way; and she was eventually provided for. They should get husbands, he says in one of his letters, "in spite of the *Morning Post.*" But with his characteristic pertinacity, he will have the money invested in no treacherous "Scrip." Lord Folkestone suggests India Bonds as a mode of investment; but Cobbett's answer is that not one farthing of money, the disposal of which lies with him, shall ever be laid out, for one hour, in any India or Government security.

"I am fixed as a rock never to have any hand in doing anything that shall tend to keep the Funds and the Nabobs in countenance. It would be a pretty thing

[8] The inevitable pamphlet appeared—a very funny one in this case. For the information of the curious, the title is, "Caution against Future Subscriptions for Prostitutes and their Associates, with Free Animadversions on several Political Gentlemen who have been Prominently Active in Promoting Subscriptions for Miss Taylor; with Particulars of the Duke of York and Mrs. Clarke" (London, 1809).

indeed for me to appeal to the compassion of the public, in order to raise the means of supporting these infernal impostures. No, I will do no such thing, and besides, I do not believe that the money would be secure."

". . . . . From the article which appeared in the *Courier* of Saturday, it is beyond a doubt that one of two things must have taken place; either a copy of the *Register*, or of proofs, must have been gotten out of Mr. Hansard's office; or my 'copy' must have been read and copied at the post-office, previously to its going to you. This latter would not at all surprise me; and, indeed, I believe it to have been so. But I wish you to speak of it to Hansard, and ask him for answer, positively, whether, to his knowledge or belief, my copy did prematurely get out of the printing-office. Because, this is a thing to state. It is another striking instance of the desperateness of our opponents.

" The news from the continent[9] is not quite so good as we thought it. That rogue, Boney, will certainly put an extinguisher upon another venerable order of things, and we shall (Lord have mercy upon us!) have another gang of kings and princes to keep. It is odd enough that we never get a queen here. We may have the Queen of Naples anon, perhaps. 'The Archduke Charles and George Rose' is, I hear, a toast at Southampton, which really does make me hesitate before I decidedly pray for the archduke's further 'success,' and before I draw out my handkerchief again to weep for the capture of Vienna. If George Rose wishes success to the Austrians, it is, I think, a pretty good proof that their success does not tend to *our* good. The sheep must necessarily have

[9] The Austrians had just suffered two serious defeats.

wishes in opposition to those of the wolf. I must confess that this toasting of old Rose along with the archduke has tended to make me somewhat more reconciled to the fate of the continent. What is good for the wolf must be bad for the sheep; and *vice versa*, as the learned say, what is good for George Rose must be bad for us. No matter what it is: if it be good for George Rose, it must be bad for us. Whatever makes the public-robbers weep ought to make us laugh; and it does make me laugh. Every blow that aims at their execrable power is a blow to be applauded by us, and by the king too, who is as badly treated as we are.

"I have a fine jackass, some pointers, and some beautiful merino sheep, sent me from Spain; and they are safely arrived. As I am very desirous of stinging the robbers, I wish it to be said in some of the newspapers that Mr. Cobbett has received a present 'from Seville, of a jackass of the real royal blood, two brace of Andalusian pointers, and some merino sheep; the whole of which are said to be the most perfect of their kind of any that have ever been seen in this country.' I should like very much to have this inserted in a paper or two, merely to enrage the rascals.

"The ass and the pointers I must send to London, for they were carried round by mistake. The sheep I have here, and most beautiful little things they are. I intend to breed from them."

The "rascals" were now at work over the Court-Martial. As related in an early chapter of this history (vol. i. p. 63), a garbled account of the affair was being circulated broadcast over the country. Thousands of copies were sent into Hampshire; and bales of

them were brought down by people from London, in their carriages, and tossed out to the passers-by.

For once in a while, then, Mr. Cobbett thinks it proper to notice the current calumny. Although it is obvious that the object of the attack is to discredit him, and thus endeavour to destroy the effect of his weekly writings, the story can be told in a different way when it is discovered that part of it has been suppressed; whilst the motive can, at the same time, be exposed and expounded. Here are Mr. Perceval and Lord Castlereagh conniving at the sale of seats in Parliament,[1] and being exposed to the world: is it any wonder that they should retaliate? Is it any wonder that they also find a story to tell?

But the *Weekly Political Register* having devoted twenty columns to a version of the story, which has truth and manliness in every sentence, and which throws still more light upon the mean-

[1] Mr. Madocks had brought forward distinct charges of corruption against these two ministers, but the House negatived his motion for inquiry. This case of "stifling" was one of the most bare-faced of even that dark age, the debate going off on the dangers of Parliamentary reform, and the "blessings we derive from the present order of things." One thing is certain, that not a soul in that House doubted Madocks's case. The "factious" minority numbered eighty-five, of whom Sir Samuel Romilly was one. He thought it impolitic of the ministry, on their own account, to try and screen themselves, and justly concluded that the debate and decision would powerfully act upon the cause of Reform. (*Vide* his "Life," ii. 116.)

ness of its opponents: the thing drops out of sight and hearing! If anybody does bring it up again, it is only the exulting accused himself, who has found one more opportunity, at their own hands, of disconcerting his antagonists.

He is urged to pursue the matter; but he protests his unwillingness to take up his time, and that of his readers, with personal matters. He has only done it now because it gives him an opportunity of showing up the "incomparable baseness" of Corruption; and the futility of her resistance to the impending Reform: the blind and passionate course which she is taking, in order to stifle inquiry.

One letter from Botley, referring to this matter, is worth quoting:—

". . . As to the twenty-two letters, I have full copies of all the principal ones, and memorandum copies of all the others. But, is it not evident, internally evident, that letters were suppressed? Does the thing begin with my charge? No, I cannot take your advice in keeping the thing up. Those who like the fun of seeing me on my defence, have either very little regard for my reputation, or very little taste. It is useless to write any more about it. What! do you really think I would condescend to answer any one, who should call upon me to *produce* letters, from which I make extracts, and which I say I have before me? Why, don't you see that even already the *Post* calls my extract from my letter to Pitt a 'fabrication'? What nonsense is it, then, to talk of producing the letters! Would not they be called fabrications

too? Oh, no! there may be just a sentence or two; but there must be no more *defences*, take my word for that. . . . . I will, at any time, show Finnerty, Power, or any friend, the original letters from the Secretary-at-War to me, and mine to him; and also my letter to Pitt, and all the charges. But I cannot condescend to do this to the public; indeed, it is impossible. They must believe me, or let it alone."

Again:—

"As to the public-robbers, one *must lose* by a continuation of the warfare with them. It is impossible to answer fellows who, in their very signature, call '*Scoundrel.*' Seriously to sit down to answer such fellows would be to degrade oneself in an obvious manner. That will never do. Besides, the thieves are beaten. . ."

Lose: indeed! the day had come, at last. On the very morrow of these swaggering lines being penned, the *Political Register* had committed itself.

As, when the heated pursuer, sure of his game as far as will, and equipment, are concerned, is brought to the ground by some mean and unconsidered obstacle: so this eager one, at the very heels of his adversaries, finds himself suddenly prostrate. And the now-exulting foe stands over him; while cries of *Habet! Habet!* sound upon his ears.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"COMPARED WITH DEFEATING ME, DEFEATING BUONAPARTE IS A MERE TRIFLE."

IF there is one thing, more than another, characteristic of the British soldier, it is his attachment to home. Home, that is to say, in the hearts of his countrymen, as well upon the hearth of his parents. You cannot make a hireling of him; nor is he a mere worshipper of glory. The links that bind him to his comrades are the same with those, which remain unsevered between him and the civilian-class whence he sprang. This is obvious enough, when we consider the general demeanour of the people toward his profession. You may see it, plainly, when the soldier is "in trouble;" or, when two red-coats are quarrelling in the street;—but, specially, on that supreme occasion when the band is playing "*The girl I left behind me!*"

But there have been times where there was danger of these affections being sundered. Notably, during the later days of the Regency, when army-

legislation went far to make the soldiery a distinct class, with interests hostile to those of "the mob." And, during the great war, the employment of German mercenaries for purposes of home defence (whilst the English forces were shedding their blood on the soil whence those had been deported) was naturally productive of some ill-feeling toward the military profession.

Of the popular sentiment, concerning this topic, there was never a better exponent than Mr. William Cobbett, late of the 54th. His constant boast was, that he had been a soldier, and knew soldiers "as well as any man that ever breathed." His appeals on their behalf, whether addressed to the legislature or to the people, breathe unfaltering affection toward them. He would defend them, would support them, would animate and would advise them, as his brethren. And, while inculcating a spirit of respect and affection toward them, on the part of the people, he constantly objected to everything likely to tend to the degradation of the military character and calling. Did a company pass through Botley, he would superintend the billeting; and could not rest until men and officers were suitably entertained. His army plan, published in 1806, was entirely upon these lines: that the military should be bound to their country by the same ties with the rest of the nation. His anecdotes of soldier-life would, alone, fill a large

volume; and, throughout his long life, there was no source from which he could so readily draw a pointed illustration of virtue, of energy, or of loyalty.

During the year 1809, his Majesty's ministers had much to harass them; and not the least of their anxieties was the conduct of the liberal part of the newspaper press, concerning Flogging in the Army and Navy. They were all condemning the tortures of the lash: the abuse, itself, being then as bad as it could be. Such was the outcry against it, that it became evident that there would have to be a struggle over the matter; and, in the fight which did ensue, may be traced some of those elements which eventually gave greater freedom to the press of this country. It was known, at this period, that newspaper-writers had been warned, and that a severe example would be made of the first offender.

The Attorney-General, then, is on the watch; and woe betide the wretch who defies Sir Vicary Gibbs!

And who is to be the victim? Shall it be James Perry or Redhead Yorke? or those daring young brothers, whose *Examiner* is slashing away at everything and everybody they choose to disagree with, and who have just had such a narrow escape over Major Hogan? or one or other of those pro-

vincial editors, who would cut off a little finger for the sake of publicity and a wider circulation? Perhaps one of these. But there is game that must be brought down, if possible: the "must" being so urgent, that the game shall be started by our very best dogs. No inefficient pointing here, if you please.

Accordingly, ministerial newspapers make ostentation of flogging-cases. The interests of the country demand: and so on. The exigencies of the nation require: and so forth. The naval and military forces are hot-beds of sedition, and nothing was ever known to cure that, but the cat-o'-nine-tails. And we shall lie at the mercy of the enemy, if the entire nation is not sound on the subject of mutiny: let us not, then, be mealy-mouthed in the stern path of duty!

And the *Courier*, in its stern path, records (24th June, 1809) :—

"The mutiny amongst the local militia, which broke out at Ely, was fortunately suppressed on Wednesday, by the arrival of four squadrons of the German Legion cavalry from Bury, under the command of General Auckland. Five of the ringleaders were tried by a Court-Martial, and sentenced to receive 500 lashes each, part of which punishment they received on Wednesday, and a part was remitted. A stoppage for their knapsacks was the ground of complaint that excited this mutinous spirit, which occasioned the men to surround their officers, and demand what they deemed their arrears."

Now, first, what is flogging—rather, what *was* it?[1] Let us have a few of Mr. Cobbett's reminiscences before we proceed:—

"At the flogging of a man, I have frequently seen seven or eight men fall slap upon the ground, unable to endure the sight, and to hear the cries, without swooning away. We used to lift them back a little way, take off their stocks, and unbutton their shirt collars, and they came to after a little while. These were as stout, hardy, and bold men as anywhere to be found."

"I, who was eight years in the army, who was a sergeant-major six years of the time, have seen men receive their flogging at *twice*, at *thrice*, and I remember a man, named Valentine Hickey, who received his flogging at *four* instalments."

". . . In addition to the pain of the flogging, the flogged man has to pay the drum-major for the use of the cats!"

"The whip-cord may be large or small. Ours used to be as thick as the very thickest twine made use of to tie up stout and heavy parcels. The knots were about the size, as nearly as I can recollect, of a dwarf marrow-fat pea; and the length of the lash was, I think, about fifteen or sixteen inches. . . . The drummers used to do the

[1] "In after-life he ['my father'] described the 'Hydra' as a hell upon the waters, and the brutal flogging of the sailors for the most trivial offences as something too horrible for contemplation. 'Often,' he used to say, 'have I wondered that men, who were treated as if they had neither hearts nor souls, should yet, in the hour of danger and of duty, forget their wrongs and indignities, act like true heroes, and pour out their heart's blood with sublime unselfishness for a country that treated them so detestably."—Charles Mackay, "Forty Years' Recollections," i. p. 13.

flogging; they were always stripped for the work, and each, by turns, laid on his twenty-five lashes, and then another came."

Just so.

On Saturday, the 1st of July, the *Weekly Political Register* takes for its motto the above paragraph from the *Courier*, and begins with the following comments :—

"LOCAL MILITIA AND GERMAN LEGION.—See the motto, English reader! See the motto, and then do pray recollect all that has been said about the way in which Buonaparte raises his soldiers. Well done, Lord Castlereagh! This is just what it was thought your plan would produce. Well said, Mr. Huskisson! It really was not without reason that you dwelt, with so much earnestness, upon the great utility of the foreign troops, whom Mr. Wardle appeared to think of no utility at all. Poor gentleman! he little imagined how a great genius might find useful employment for such troops. He little imagined that they might be made the means of compelling Englishmen to submit to that sort of *discipline*, which is so conducive to the producing in them a disposition to defend the country at the risk of their lives. Let Mr. Wardle look at my motto, and then say whether the German soldiers are of *no use*. *Five hundred lashes each!* Aye, that is right! Flog them! flog them! flog them! They deserve it, and a great deal more. They deserve a flogging at every meal-time. 'Lash them daily! lash them duly!' What! shall the

rascals dare to *mutiny?* and that, too, when the German Legion is so near at hand? Lash them! lash them! lash them! They deserve it. Oh, yes! they merit a double-tailed cat! Base dogs! What! mutiny for the *price of a knapsack?* Lash them! flog them! Base rascals! Mutiny for the price of a goat's-skin; and then, upon the appearance of the German soldiers, they take a flogging as quietly as so many trunks of trees! I do not know what sort of a place Ely is; but I really should like to know how the inhabitants looked one another in the face while this scene was exhibiting in their town. I should like to have been able to see their faces, and to hear their observations to each other, at the time. This occurrence at home will, one would hope, teach *the loyal* a little caution in speaking of the means which Napoleon employs (or rather, which they say he employs) in order to get together and to discipline his conscripts. There is scarcely any one of these loyal persons who has not, at various times, cited the hand-cuffings, and other means of force, said to be used in drawing out the young men of France; there is scarcely one of the loyal who has not cited these means as a proof, a complete proof, that the people of France *hate Napoleon and his Government*, assist *with reluctance in his wars*, and would fain *see another revolution.* I hope, I say, that the loyal will, hereafter, be more cautious in drawing such conclusions, now that they see that our 'gallant defenders' not only require physical restraint, in certain cases, but even a little blood drawn from their backs, and that, too, with the aid and assistance of *German* troops. Yes; I hope the loyal will be a little more upon their guard in drawing conclusions against Napoleon's popularity. At any rate, every time they do, in future, burst out in

execrations against the French for suffering themselves to be 'chained together and forced, at the point of the bayonet, to do military duty,' I shall just re-publish the passage, which I have taken for a motto to the present sheet. I have *heard* of some other pretty little things of the sort; but I rather choose to take my instance (and a very complete one it is) from a public print, notoriously under the sway of the ministry."

So much for your "comment-maker."

What personage had the distinction of walking home from church with Mr. Perceval, on the following day, history does not record: his comments, then, remain in oblivion. No matter that, however. In about three weeks after the above publication, Mr. Cobbett has news from London, which he thus retails:—

". . . . I have a most serious business to impart to you, and that is, that I hear from Mr. White, that the miscreants are about to prosecute me for the article about the flogging of the local militia. What I wish you to do is to go to Mr. White and ask him,

"1. Whether the thing be *certain?*

"2. What is to be done in it by me, in the first instance?

"3. At what time it will be required for me to be in town to give bail?

"4. When the trial will take place?

"5. Of what nature is the bail that I must give?

"It is quite useless to fret and stew about this. I must meet it. They may probably confine me for two

years; but that does not kill a man; and may, besides, produce even good effects, in more ways than one.

"But the main thing is to be prepared. There is a *possibility* of acquittal, though they push their malice to its full extent. Let us, therefore, be prepared; let us take all proper precautions; and then wait the chapter of accidents. Your better way will be to show this part of my letter to Mr. White, and pray thank him most heartily, in my name, for his kindness in giving me the information. . . . What I would do, in case of imprisonment, is this. I would make F. Reid come and take charge of my lands, &c. I will, even *now*, cut off all expenses of horses, dogs, &c., so as to make up for the loss; and I would have such a plan of economy as should enable me to have my family near me, if possible. Thus, you see, my mind is made up to the thing. I care for nothing that they can do. I would certainly defend myself. . . .

". . . Let me alone; if they will but leave me the use of the press, I'll beat them all, I warrant you."

Mr. Reeves appears to have been sounded, by Mr. Wright, upon the possibility of escape from prosecution. Cobbett expresses some displeasure, however, on hearing of this, and adds:—

". . . I am fully prepared for the worst, and therefore am no longer under any anxiety. I would rather be gibbeted, than owe my life to the intercession such as you speak of, and such as I am afraid you half-solicited. I told you to keep very quiet. Say nothing at all about the matter to any one. Ask no questions; and only be sure to tell me precisely what you hear. I am not afraid

of them. Times are coming on when we shall all have enough to do; but, in the meanwhile, I shall not worry myself to death with apprehension. . . ."

Instead of any fear of the future, the look-out is rather toward the welfare and increase of his estate. Some plots of land have just been purchased, with the object of making freeholders of Wright, Finnerty, and others. The prospects of harvest are very bad, for the rains have been so incessant, that wheat is growing in the ear; but the trees are coming on "delightfully." Lord Cochrane arrives home, and comes to see Botley with the tale of his grievances.

Mr. Cobbett pays his occasional visit to Lord Folkestone, at Coleshill; and horses and puppies, and hares and pheasants, reappear in their order, not at all as though the threatened danger would be anything beyond a scare.

Among Mr. Cobbett's friends was one who had become peculiarly bound up in his affairs, through circumstances which must now be noticed.

Mr. John Swann, of Wolvercot and Ensham, in Oxfordshire, was an eminent paper-maker of that day; his mills being the chief sources of supply for the University of Oxford. He had supplied also the paper for the *Register* from a very early period; and it would appear that a strong attach-

ment existed between him and the Cobbetts. As far back as September, 1805, when purchases of land were being made in Hampshire, somewhat beyond Mr. Cobbett's command of ready money, Mr. Swann had assisted him by discounting accommodation bills. At the death of the latter, in January, 1807, his brother James succeeded both to the paper-mills and to the accommodation paper; and to the friendship thus continued into another family, we are indebted to some further glimpses of Cobbett's happy domestic life. Mr. Swann is initiated into the mysteries of planting: eels from the sluggish Oxford streams grace the table at Botley, and game from Hampshire that of Ensham. And, as time fled on, the perilous accumulation of "credit" seemed only to add new links of love.

The following selection from correspondence belongs to the later months of 1808:—

JAMES SWANN to JOHN WRIGHT.

"I am not at all surprised at the increased sale of the *Register;* every one who reads it is astonished at the wonderful extent of Mr. Cobbett's abilities. God grant him a long life, for the country's sake! . . . . Mr. Barwis has lately been with Mr. and Mrs. Cobbett at Botley; they have kindly promised to be sponsors to a son Mrs. Swann presented me with a fortnight ago, whom I shall have named William."

WM. C. to J. S.

"Mr. Barwis has communicated to me your wish respecting my being godfather to your son, and I assure you, with perfect sincerity, that I shall look upon it as doing me honour. I never was yet a godfather to any child but one of my own, who was born in a heathen country; and there are very few persons, to a child of whom I would stand godfather; but one of yours I shall with great pleasure. I hear it is to be after Christmas, which will suit me best, as I have a great deal to do here before, in the planting way, which I cannot possibly trust in any hands but my own. . . .

"I have now a favour, in the sporting way, to ask of you. I have had most lamentable luck with dogs, having lost almost the whole of a fine and rare collection of spaniel and greyhound puppies. Of the latter I shall not take much pains to get any more, the places for coursing being at such a great distance from me; but of the former I want many, because we live amongst such covers as nothing can be moved out of without a plenty of good spaniels. The sort we want is the short-legged, rather coarse-haired, long-eared, and feathered down the legs to the very tips of the nails. This is the most strong, true, and resolute race. None other will do in endless covers like ours, where the stuff is so very thick, and there are such quantities of matted thorns as sharp as pins. Now, if you should happen to know of a famous breed—some gentleman whose breed is famous all over the country—I should like to have a brace; which may, perhaps, be obtained by speaking time enough beforehand. But there is another condition (for, when one is begging, one may as well go the whole length), I wish not to have them

till they are at least four months old. Young puppies, if of a high breed, will not live. . . .

"There is, I am told, a fine breed called the Woodstock or Blenheim breed; but, if you will inquire, you will easily find out a fine breed. *Every one's dogs are the best in England;* but there are some gentlemen and noblemen (a very few) of standing reputation for their breed of spaniels, and a brace of this sort it is that I want. Spaniels should have no spice of *the hound* in them. Tan colour over the eyes is, therefore, a sure mark of reprobation. Such will hunt hares; and, when they have moved one in a large thick cover, the sportsman may go a-shooting by himself.

"After all, if the thing be attended with much trouble, pray do not take it, for your time is too valuable to be wasted in the gratification of my whims."

J. S. to J. W.

"I duly received yours this morning. I was much amused with the caricature, it is certainly a good one. I heard from Mr. Cobbett a few days ago, and am endeavouring to procure him some good spaniels. I do not expect our christening will be till about or after Christmas, when I shall be glad to see you here. I have another son to go through the ceremony besides William, whom we shall name *John*, and shall beg you to be his godfather. . . ."

This excursion did not come off till May, 1809, for some reason or other. Mr. Wright was very nearly being entrapped into matrimony on the occasion, with an interesting widow who was one of the visitors.

WM. C. to J. S.

"We got home in very good time; but had the mortification to see the road drier and drier, as we advanced, till, when we came to Botley, the dust flew, and we have not had one drop of rain since. Nevertheless, all my plantations go on exceedingly well. I am satisfied that, with some people's planting, half the trees would now have been dead. Get the books I recommended, and in the *Profitable Planter* see the articles 'Willow' and 'Black Italian Poplar.' The aspen is good, and I prefer it. But be sure not to plant Lombardy poplar. It is not fit even to burn."

An important outward change came over the *Register* at the beginning of the year 1809. Mr. Cobbett had for some time been dissatisfied with the printing of Messrs. Cox and Baylis; and it was therefore transferred to Mr. T. C. Hansard. An improvement was manifest at once, and the *Register* took the position of those publications which were discarding the antiquated types of the past. Some little notion of the extent of the enterprise that was going on may be gathered by an estimate furnished to Swann of the probable *monthly* supply of paper that would be required:—

"Register . . .	60 reams.
State Trials . .	96 „
Parl. History . .	50 „
Parl. Debates . .	50 „
Total .	256 reams."

As the *Register* was in 16 pages 8vo, with occasional supplements, the weekly circulation must have been nearly six thousand at this period. Very soon after this change, the price was raised to 1*s.* from 10*d.*, at which figure it had stood since its commencement. The price of paper had risen from 24*s.* to 43*s.* a ream, and the newspaper stamp from a halfpenny to 3½*d.*; besides that, other expenses had proportionally augmented. Great must have been the hold which Cobbett had obtained, over a large number of readers, for his journal to have been able to keep its place under such circumstances.

The threatened prosecution hung so long over Mr. Cobbett's head, that some of his friends began to hope that nothing would come of it. He probably thought, for his own part, that the Government were not unmindful of the sort of antagonist he would make, when driven to bay; and that they would think twice before going into the contest without the minutest preparation, and the best possible opportunity. In a letter to Mr. Swann, dated 28th November, he says,—

"You have, I suppose, heard of the dead set which the Attorney-General is making upon us. My opinion is that it will come to nothing at all. But, if it does, we must beat them, if there be either spirit or honesty left in England."

There will be no lack of preparation, however:—

WM. C. to J. WRIGHT.

"Dear Sir,—As I am to have the pleasure of seeing you on Wednesday, I shall say the less here. But, as to the now most interesting subject, I cannot help saying a few words, as they may be usefully communicated to Mr. Bagshaw and Mr. Hansard, *in confidence*. My resolution is to plead my own cause, if I am well in health. Nothing upon earth, illness excepted, shall make me forego this resolution. I am also resolved to defend; that is, to *justify;* and to render the affair a great public question. The sooner we begin, the sooner we shall be well prepared, and the more likely to secure a favourable issue. You will know how and where to get me the authorities, or facts, for showing,—

"1. That the ministers, or their partisans, have been employed for more than six months in publishing libels against me; atrocious falsehoods (such as the 4000*l.* story) for the purpose of exciting, in the public mind, an evil opinion of me; and thus pave the way for this state prosecution.

"2. That the ministers themselves (or, at least, Canning, &c.) have written libels, if these be libels; and, upon this point, to get together all the *accusations*, and all the *nicknames*, used by the Anti-Jacobins against Moira, Nichol, &c.

"3. That there were *caricatures* prepared under the eye of Canning, &c., and of whom, and how they were to be represented as traitors.

"4. That there are writers hired, or paid, by the Government.

"5. To get a good historical view of the state prose-

cutions for libel, and show how they have originated with bad Governments and wicked lawyers; and to show, in short, that the Stuarts suffered more from this cause than from any other.

"6. To get collected, all the best speeches and strong sayings of eminent men against an army of foreigners in England. You will easily get me some good matter upon this subject, by looking back into the *Parliamentary History*.

"7. Think of any of the poets who have written against mercenary foreign armies.

"8. Have not the Swiss and Walloon Guards, in Spain, now joined Buonaparte?

"9. I must have, from good authority, the particulars of the contract made with the German Legion, about not being sent out of Europe.

"It will be time enough to set about any part of this, after you have been here; but you will turn your mind to the several points in the meanwhile.

"Be particular in attending, now, to any publication whatever, wherein mention is made of this prosecution, and especially if it has for its object the prejudicing of the public against me. When I get hold of such a thing, I shall begin my operations.

"Do as you please about mentioning my intention to defend myself, to Hansard, or any of them; but be sure to tell them from me, that I hold the thing in contempt; that I am no more afraid of the rascals than I could be of so many mice. And, really, if we have an *honest jury*, it will be a famous thing altogether.

"I thank you very kindly for your news about my wife. I am a great deal more anxious about her than about the prosecution."

He continues to remind his correspondent that it will answer no purpose to soothe his anxiety by flattering him with hopes of escape. At the end of the year, there is, however, still no prospect of the trial coming on. The following is dated 31st December :—

"What I want information about, relative to the approaching trial, is, in the first place, a reference to all the debates which you know anything of, against foreign troops. . . . You said that Mr. Bosville had a list of instances of those countries who had fallen under a defence by foreign troops. Can you get it from him? It would do for a mere enumeration in a speech. Arguments against a mercenary army apply equally well to foreign troops. I shall think of other matter in my next. I will prepare everything here against the 23rd, and, as soon as we find that the cause *is* to come on, I will set off for London, and continue there till the cause be over. In the meanwhile, I will arrange a defence in my own way. If we have an honest, I mean an *impartial* jury, I am no more afraid of Vicary than I am of a fly."

On the 8th January, he writes :—

". . . . I have read the trial of Tooke all through, and also his other trial, in the case of Fox's action against him. . . . What villains he had to deal with! His life is a history of the hypocritical tyrannies of this jubilee[2]

[2] On the previous 25th of October, the occasion of the King's entering the fiftieth year of his reign, there had been great "rejoicings." The Parliamentary Reformists, however, did not approve of it, holding that *the prosperity of the country* was a hypocritical and

reign. I shall profit a good deal from this reading; but mine must be a defence of a different sort; less of law knowledge, and more of a plain story, and an appeal to the *good sense* and *justice* of my hearers.

"I do not know that I mentioned the following things to you before:—

"1. That number of the *Courier* which contained the article that I took for a motto to the flogging article.

"2. Those numbers of the *Post* and *Courier* which, as you told me, contained an exhortation to prosecute me.

"Indeed, we should have files of those papers for the last eight months; for I must dwell upon the endeavours to excite prejudice against me."

The same letter proceeds to mention his plans for arranging his pecuniary affairs—a matter of hardly-inferior importance, considering their tangled condition. As soon as possible, he will then go up to London to await events.

". . . . I do not know whether they have given a notice of trial, formally; but I think they will. . . . They feel the deep wounds I have given them; and they lose sight of everything but revenge. I really do not know which I ought to wish for—a trial or a *nolle prosequi*. My character and fame call for the former; but then, my health and my dearly-beloved family call for the latter, or

delusive cry. Mr. Cobbett boasted of his refusal to subscribe toward giving the twelve hundred thousand paupers "that rarity, that luxury, a bellyful," and gave very good reasons for it. The Whig papers, too, heaped much derision upon the affair. One of the incidents of the day was a fellow sticking up a placard at Charing Cross, in these terms: "May God disperse the votaries of Cobbett, as the clouds of this day!"

for anything which shall preclude the chance of a villainous sentence. However, I am rather indifferent about the matter. . . .

". . . . God send us good luck; but if not, good *heart*, which I trust I, at least, shall not want. My intention is to meet my accusers in a manner worthy of the advocate of truth."

Mr. James Perry was in trouble again, early in 1810. The Attorney-General had filed information against the *Morning Chronicle* and the *Examiner*, for a paragraph in which the Whig hopes of the day were embodied. These hopes were to be fulfilled when the Prince of Wales succeeded to the throne, and the obnoxious paragraph ended with these words:—

"Of all monarchs, indeed, since the Revolution, the successor of George the Third will have the finest opportunity of becoming nobly popular."

The interpretation put upon this by the "friends of order"[1] was, that the life of George III. stood between his people and the blessings in store for them! Mr. Perry conducted his own defence, and

[1] The *friends of order* were fairly proficient in the language of the fish-market; e.g., "To the indignation and execration of the British nation do we therefore consign this damning specimen of the abominable and infamous sentiments by which the base faction are impelled in their most unprincipled and diabolical pursuits," was the remark of the *Post*, at the close of its comments upon the wicked *Chronicle*.

was acquitted; and the record as against the *Examiner* was forthwith withdrawn. This occurrence was a subject of rejoicing to the whole tribe of scribblers,—at least, of those who were not subsidized; and the failure of the prosecution correspondingly inflamed the minds of the administration. Peter Finnerty was another victim of this year. And, after some further halting, it was determined to bring forward the record against Mr. Cobbett, after his friends had begun to be tranquilized with the hope that he would not be molested.

It is highly probable, but for the urging to prosecution, on the part of the ministerial press, that he might have been let alone. But they would not be true to the common cause. Bound in the fetters of party, or of pence, the press was, as yet, ignorant of the latent force which has since made of it a Fourth Estate. And, with respect to Mr. Cobbett, it is impossible to withhold the conviction that the envy and the injustice of his rivals had more to do with moulding his fortunes than all other causes put together.

WM. C. to J. W.

"Your letter, this day got, contained the best and most agreeable news. . . . We have all, I and my wife, six children, and every soul in the house, drunk Mr. Perry's health. I made even little Susan lisp out the words.

Pray give my kindest and most respectful compliments to him; and tell him that I do not only most heartily rejoice at his success (which, by the bye, does not surprise me), but beg leave to present my sincere thanks; in which, I trust, I only participate with the rest of the gentlemen connected with the press. Nothing but the necessity of attending to my concerns here this week would have prevented me from returning to town immediately, in order to endeavour to urge in person, what I request you to urge for me; namely, a public dinner at the Crown and Anchor, of 'the Friends of the Liberty of the Press,' at which we ought to pass a vote of thanks to Mr. Perry, and to proclaim some principles that may be of the utmost importance in future. Now is the time for us to assert our rights, and the respectability of our profession and character.[4] . . . Mr. Perry has done more good than any man of his time, and it is for us to profit by it. . . ."

[4] The "profession and character" of the fraternity had just been roughly assailed in Parliament by Mr. Windham. The question of excluding reporters from the gallery of the House of Commons was one which would come up at intervals, and it was one upon which most public men changed their opinions, from time to time, according to circumstances. Mr. Windham was now for shutting the gallery; and he described the publishers of the Debates as bankrupts, lottery-office keepers, footmen, and decayed tradesmen, and he had heard "that they were a sort of men who would give into corrupt misrepresentations of opposite sides." As Mr. Wright was the only person among the parliamentary reporters who could be put under the head of "bankrupts," the *Political Register* gave Mr. Windham a castigation.

The venal writers of the day, of course, called this black treachery and ingratitude. But then such writers had no interest in upholding the craft—rather the other way. Of this class was the *Satirist, or Monthly Meteor*, one of the foulest pieces of rubbish that ever disgraced the periodical press. This paper recommended that Cobbett's article (which was in extremely temperate terms) should

Another public incident, of this period, was the celebrated conflict of Sir Francis Burdett with "Mr. Speaker." Mr. Gale Jones had been imprisoned by the House of Commons; and Burdett took occasion to address his constituents,—by means of a long letter in Cobbett's *Register*—denying the power of the House to imprison any but its own members. The letter was composed by Cobbett himself.

Mr. Speaker walked home from church [5] with Mr. Perceval on the following day. The latter proposed to move the House to commit Burdett to the Tower, and order the attendance of Cobbett. And so, as every one knows, the metropolis was upset, for the space of two or three months, by an indecent squabble, which brought the House into

be framed and glazed by every public man, as a warning never to trust this wretch, &c.

The *Satirist* was one long-drawn libel. The editor must have been utterly insusceptible of shame, or else must have been in the habit of deadening his moral feelings by artificial means. Even the good and patriotic Whitbread was represented as one who delighted in practising, upon his own estate, that tyranny against which he declaimed in the House of Commons. As for Finnerty, he is always "the miscreant," and Mr. Wardle, "the l——r." Wright is described as "the poor devil who now corrects Cobbett's bad English, edits his Parliamentary History, brushes his coat, puffs him in coffee-houses and debating-shops, and does all his other dirty work," &c.

It is very difficult to please everybody. The *Examiner* presently began to write down Mr. Windham, supporting itself with this affair of the reporters, and howled at Mr. Cobbett for not doing the same. The fact being that Cobbett was especially careful to avoid needless animadversions upon his old friend.

[5] Lord Colchester's "Diary and Correspondence," ii. 240.

great disrespect, and made Burdett the idol of the populace. In the end, it required 50,000 soldiers and militia to get him into the Tower; but not all the king's horses, nor all the king's men, could rend away the mantle of ridicule which the action of ministers had brought upon themselves.

Mr. Cobbett was not ordered to attend the bar of the House. More the pity: Cobbett in Newgate, illegally imprisoned by order of the House of Commons, would have been a very different affair to Cobbett in Newgate *ex* The Attorney-General! Yet he was not forgotten.

WM. C. to J. W.

"So, then, the honourable House have, at last, resolved to have the *Register* read to them. That is one sign of amendment, and if they do but follow it up by a similar motion every week, it cannot fail to do them a great deal of good, if anything in this world can do them good. If they call me before them, I shall say that, as the Speaker himself sent me his speech to publish, I, of course, thought it right to publish the speech of any member of the House, especially when he put his name to it.

"But what I am, at this moment, anxious about, is that Mr. Madocks should again bring forward his last year's motion. You will perceive that the worry now making is about breaches of privilege, tending to degrade and vilify the House. Now, what can have so clear and strong a tendency this way, as the having *sold seats in the House*, and the having turned out a member for not being willing to vote against his conscience? Why not punish those

who were guilty of such offences? This is the ground whereon to proceed; and what a fine, what a striking, what a glorious effect it would have now, to renew Mr. Madocks's motion! What could they do? What could they *say?* Good God! what an exhibition they would make before the country! . . ."

". . . . So far so good! I am delighted with what has taken place, and especially with the conduct of Lord Folkestone,[6] who, as I always told you, is the truest man in all England. Don't you remember the eulogium that we pronounced upon him, at your house, on Friday? That is the good of him: you may always depend upon him for more than he promises you. Who would have thought, some years ago, that he would have been the man to answer the minister? And to beat him, too! His speech, even as reported, is a master-piece; and there was no time for preparation. I always told him what he was able to do, if he could but muster up courage. . . ."

". . . . The decision upon the Walcheren affair is what was to be desired, I think, looking to the only object which we ought to have in view, a Reform of the Parliament. Now, then, what will the Edinburgh Reviewers say? I shall now quote their own words against themselves. Will they now openly join us, as they said they would, or will they again shuffle? At any rate, the honourable House, so far from agreeing with the country, have approved of what the country has most unequivocally condemned. This cannot fail to tell. Will the Whigs *now* join the people? They have no other

[6] Lord Folkestone had reminded the House, on the 26th March, that it had been the practice of Andrew Marvel to write a full account of the proceedings of the House of Commons to his constituents every week.

rational course left, but will they not rather sink into eternal oblivion?"

In the middle of May, the Attorney-General had made up his mind; and Mr. Cobbett came up to London to the "naming" of the jury.

Upon his return to Botley, his hands are fuller than ever. Money has to be provided, so that there shall be no tradesmen in Hampshire left unpaid. "Since last January we have paid for everything, the butcher excepted, as we have had it. No bills of any sort; and I must leave here none at all, if I can help it, when I go up to the trial."

Copy for the *Register* goes up to London in undiminished quantity; and there is, besides, the preparation for his defence. Friends furnish hints, and supply him with books:—

"To-day has been devoted wholly (since seven o'clock) to the reading of the volumes sent me by the coach. That sent by Mr. Holt White is full of most excellent matter. In short, if those who are to decide are not *baseness itself*, I am safe."

Those who were to decide were, at length, brought together, and they took two minutes over it.

CHAPTER XIX.

"THE FOLLY, COMMON TO ALL TYRANTS, IS THAT THEY PUSH THINGS TOO FAR."

ON the 15th June, 1810, the Court of King's Bench was at last prepared to hear the Attorney-General's story. Mr. Cobbett, Mr. Budd, Mr. Bagshaw, and Mr. Hansard accordingly appeared, to answer the charge of writing, printing, and publishing a seditious "libel." Stern Ellenborough presided within, and a deeply-interested public waited without, the Court.

Withal,—Mr. Attorney-General, Lord Ellenborough, and the expectant public, each and every one knew, in his heart, that Mr. Cobbett was about to be tried for exposing the king's ministers; for his sarcasms over the Duke of Clarence and "Mother Jordan;" for showing up Mrs. Clarke; for his discoveries in political corruption; aye, and for quarrelling with the *Morning Post*.

Mr. Attorney-General's story, however, dealt with none of these topics. The burden of his tale was,

that the defendant charged the Government with cruelty, and suggested to the wicked mutineers the cruelty and injustice of their punishment. That certain brave and honourable men had been driven from their own land, and had "sought shelter in ours;" and had offered their blood for the glory and safety of their adopted country. That the defendant's paper was a libel on the brave and honourable men; while its obvious tendency was to deter the common people from entering the militia.

The speech of the defendant was temperate, even to tameness. The opportunity of accumulating fire and passion, in support of unwelcome truth, was thrown away. But there is little doubt that Cobbett had some faith left in the honesty of a jury; besides a fallacious belief that the ostensible cause of the prosecution was the real one, and that the matter would be decided upon its merits. Had he, rather, boldly scorned the adversary, and dared him to disprove that the present was an episode in political warfare, which gave undue advantage (for the time) to the cause of might against right: at the same time, reiterating his wish to excite the public indignation against amateur tyranny, had kept up an attitude of defiance,—the foe would have been cowed, although, perhaps, not made more relenting. There was no mercy in Vicary Gibbs, nor in Lord Ellenborough, toward the champions of the press; and Mr. Cobbett, as champion

for the day, should have recollected that the cause itself was again on its trial. The day would be certain to go against him; it was notoriously a personal attack; but, had he chosen to disregard his own personality, and to hurl back in the Attorney's face the persecuting character which that worthy had given to his office,—he would have dealt that stroke at licensed hypocrisy which was left for the task of William Hone.

One grave error was committed by Mr. Cobbett in his defence: it was very weak for him to say that the words were written *in haste*.[1] Otherwise, the general burden of his speech was: how atrociously he had been calumniated, from his first appearance as an independent writer, to the present moment, with the Attorney's unjust imputations on his loyalty and honesty; and how the Government was known to be influencing the propagation of such calumny. That he had done good to his

[1] Augustus de Morgan gives a story which he had from Francis Place. Place was, with others, advising Cobbett as to the proper line of defence. "Said Place, 'You must put in the letters you have received from Ministers, Members of the Commons, from the Speaker downwards, about your *Register*, and their wish to have subjects noted. You must then ask the jury whether a person so addressed must be considered as a common sower of sedition, &c. You will be acquitted; nay, if your intention should get about, very likely they will manage to stop proceedings.' Cobbett was too much disturbed to listen; he walked about the room, ejaculating, 'D —— the prison!' and the like. He had not the sense to follow the advice, and was convicted." *Vide* "Budget of Paradoxes," p. 119.

neighbours and to his country, according to his measure. That the Attorney's forced construction of his words could not be borne out. That his attachment to the British soldier could not be questioned. That the so-called Hanoverian legion was composed, to a great extent, of persons of no country; and that they were a nuisance, from their general bad behaviour, in whatever part of England they happened to be quartered.[2]

This last was, of course, a fresh libel, of which the Attorney-General did not fail to make a new point. And he had the meanness to try and prove that the delay in the prosecution was the defendant's own doing.[3] He thought, too, that the defendant had better consulted his character and fame, by going along with the three other culprits, in suffering judgment to go by default.

Lord Ellenborough went through the libel *seriatim*, making his own comments; and concluded, after asking the jury whether its tendency was not to injure the military service,—

[2] Robert Huish, who is by no means favourably disposed towards Cobbett, says upon this point, "The truth was on Cobbett's side, as every one can substantiate who had ever the misfortune to reside in the place where the German mercenaries were quartered."

[3] "The use which Sir Vicary Gibbs generally made of his power of issuing *ex officio* informations was to lay an information against the offending writers, but not to proceed to trial, exacting a promise from them that, if he did not pursue it, they would write nothing offensive to the Government, and thus holding it *in terrorem* over their heads."—Andrews's "British Journalism," ii. 57.

"It is for you to say whether these be words escaped in haste from a man, otherwise writing temperately, but whose zeal overshot his discretion; or whether they are the words of a man who wished to dissolve the union of the military, upon which, at all times, but now especially at this time, the safety of the kingdom depends. If this latter be the case, surely the defendant will meritedly fall under the character of that seditious person, which the information charges him with being. In cases like the present, the law requires me to state my opinion to the jury; and, where I have held a different opinion to that which I have of the present case, I have not withheld it from the jury. I do pronounce this to be a most infamous and seditious libel."

It was now midnight, and the jury had nothing in the shape of a doubt in their minds. Why should they have? They had no doubts when they took their seats in the morning. Juries were juries in those days; why should they have doubts, at the end of a drama, for the particular conclusion of which they were particularly brought together?

So they "consulted" for about two minutes, and returned their verdict of "*Guilty.*"

J. SWANN to J. WRIGHT.

"I learned the unfortunate result of the trial about two o'clock on Friday, and immediately hastened to the hotel, Covent Garden, to see if Mr. Cobbett would require any bail, but I found he had left town. I need not tell you how much I am concerned at the verdict. . . . ."

WM. C. to J. W.

"I found Mrs. Cobbett very well, and quite prepared for what had happened. She bears the thing with her usual fortitude; and takes hourly occasion to assure me that she thinks I have done what I ought to do. In this she is excellent. She is the only wife that I ever saw, who, in such circumstances, did not express *sorrow*, at least, for what the husband had done; and, in such cases, sorrow is only another word for *blame*. Nancy was a good deal affected, but she soon got over it. If I had but about three weeks for preparation I should like it better; but I must settle things here as well as I can. Dr. Mitford will tell you *what has been suggested to me*, and what (if anything) will be done in consequence of it.

"Send me by the coach to-morrow . . . . Mother Clarke's book, for I must notice the contents of it this week. You will have, in my writing, twenty-four columns, the greater part of it by to-morrow's and next day's posts. The rest of the double-number I should like to have made up of proceedings about reform, such as have appeared in the *Times* and other daily papers; but, at present, the more harmless the things are the better. I shall write as boldly as ever, but I will take care of my subjects. The proofs of approaching scarcity can be no longer disguised. It will be very great and complete indeed. I shall be disappointed if the quartern loaf be not half-a-crown before Christmas. I wonder whether it be true that Buonaparte has stopped the exportation of corn from his dominions? If it be, you will soon see the effect of it. You see, that no rascal of a newspaper has touched upon the subject. It will come upon us by-and-bye with a vengeance."

What had been suggested?

The reader will recollect [*ante*, p. 96] that the notion of any intercession on his behalf was warmly deprecated by Mr. Cobbett from the very first; and no sign of a craven spirit had appeared during all these twelve tantalizing months. His mind was made up. The long-deferred prospect of a term in prison had been getting still more remote, and its accompanying terrors would be unheeded. But, back again among his beloved fields and woods, and surrounded by a little family which could but dimly appreciate the situation; struck with anxious cares that must result from his predicament, he listens to a *suggestion.*

The form and the terms of that suggestion are unknown, and will probably remain unknown; that is of little consequence, however. Suffice it to say, that before a week was out, negotiations were going on, through Mr. John Reeves, for some measure of indulgence, by which, at least, the Attorney-General was to hold his hand, and not move the Court for judgment. At the same time, a farewell article was prepared for the *Political Register;* for Mr. Cobbett foresaw that he could not continue it without softening his tone, if he were to be indulged; and softening his tone was out of the question. Preparations were made for disposing of the remaining sets of the work, and for renouncing his profession of political writer, "until better days."

This weakness did not last long. There would seem to have been a suspicion that the Government were enticing him into making the sacrifice, before letting the law come down in all its force.

WM. C. to J. W.

"I will not sacrifice fortune without securing freedom in return. It would be both baseness and folly. Your threat to R[eeves] was good, and spoke my sentiment exactly. I have not time for telling you my plan now; but let it suffice that, really, from the bottom of my soul, I would RATHER be called up than put down the *Register*."

On the following day, Peter Finnerty posted up to London with full powers to stop negotiation, and to see that the farewell article was cancelled. Need it be said that the affair got wind? It was intended to get it in the wind. No one can doubt that this was a final effort to add to the discomfiture, and tarnish the reputation, of a really brave man, by exposing him to the charge of having sold himself at last.

And the effort was, to some extent, successful. Absurd versions of the story were circulated for years afterwards, and ridiculous misrepresentations are still afloat: all of which have the merit of being consistent, on one point, viz., in the exhibition of an unquenchable hatred toward one of the bravest and faithfulest souls that ever breathed.

After Finnerty's departure, the spirits of the little household arose once more. "Indignation and resentment took place of grief and alarm;" Mrs. Cobbett and her little Nancy got their courage back again; and the master wrote up to London—"The best way is to be as calm as possible, and to wait with patience for better days." Even Mr. Wright, inspired with returning pluck, thinks there ought to be "something powerful" sent up for next week's paper.

On the 5th of July, the four defendants answered to their bail, while the Attorney-General prayed the judgment of the Court. Fresh hypocrisy was uttered, of course:—

"The army, against whom this libel is in a peculiar manner directed, calls on the Court for judgment against its traducer. . . . . The Government calls for confirmation of its legal powers. . . . . The country calls for protection against the numerous evils which the propagation of such publications was calculated to engender. . . . . Justice is called for; and justice, to be sure, will be tempered with mercy. But the Court will not forget that mercy is due to the public, as well as to the defendant at the bar."

The defendants were forthwith committed to the King's Bench prison, with directions that they be brought up on the following Monday to receive sentence.

The *Register*, meanwhile, had been for two con-

secutive weeks without any contribution to the topics of the day, on the part of the editor; and now, again, he is compelled to apologize, for the third time, for a similar omission.[4] He had not nearly completed his domestic arrangements, before it was necessary to leave Botley for the last time. And, as for sitting down to write for the information

[4] This omitting to write for two or three weeks, together with the rumoured dropping of the *Register*, created tremendous sensation among the scribbling fraternity. The *Morning Chronicle* returned to Cobbett all the warm feelings which Perry had received from him. The *Examiner*, on the other hand, was mercilessly unjust. That vigorous paper was then in its early priggish days, and could brook no rivalry. Leigh Hunt looked with contempt upon all the set of Cobbetts and Cochranes, as not Reformists after his sort, and he now proceeded to attack Cobbett violently for his timidity, and for his whining about being torn from his home, &c.; adding that politicians must be prepared to endanger individual freedom for the sake of the general good. But then the "spirit of martyrdom had been inculcated" in the Hunts from the very cradle.

The readers of the *Examiner*, however, were not at one with their editor upon this point. One correspondent thought it ill-befitting a Reformist to overlook all the merits of a fellow-labourer, just at the moment of his being down, and "to dwell with a malignant ecstasy on all the failings that industrious malice could scrape together from years of bold and zealous service." It was also pointed out, with much justice, that Mr. Cobbett was singular in this: that he not only confessed his errors when he had found them out, but argued clearly and decisively against them. Of course, the *Examiner* was so clever that it had no errors to retract.

Leigh Hunt appears to have discovered, in after-years, that he often made extravagant demands upon other people's virtue; and the allusion, in his autobiography, to some want of charity toward other people's opinions, points to this period, when intolerance could animate the Radical quite as easily as the privileged mind.

Mr. Redhead Yorke had long been converted from Radicalism, and had no sympathy for the delinquent. But he was, now, on the other side.

or the amusement of the public, every one must feel the impossibility of his being able so to divert his mind from the circumstances in which he was now placed. He could not banish the thought, that exactly ten years ago to the very day, he landed in England, "after having lost a fortune in America solely for the sake of that same England;" yet his reflections, he added, were "in some measure driven out by the contempt which I feel for the venal slaves who have seized upon this (as they regard it) moment of my depression, to misrepresent and insult me."

Westminster Hall was crowded on the following Monday. Strangers were ordered to be removed from the lower part of the Court; but the order had to be disregarded, for fear of adding to the confusion. Ellenborough, with three other judges, occupied the bench, of whom Mr. Justice Grose was the one selected to pass sentence. After judgment had been prayed, in the usual form, the judge proceeded to remark upon the enormity of the offence:—

The libel was a work which no well-disposed mind could doubt to have been framed for the most pernicious objects. Looking at the time at which it was written—looking at the circumstances of the world—there could be no doubt of the evil intentions of the paper. The whole tendency of it was, in so many words, to excite unwillingness and dislike to the service of the country, amongst

those who are to be its defence, and to insult those foreigners who are in our service, to deprive the country of their honourable assistance, and to paralyze the energies of the State. The objects of the libel were too palpable for doubt, &c. . . . . "The jury found you, William Cobbett, guilty, upon the fullest and most satisfactory evidence. If it were to be allowed, that your object was not to enfeeble and embarrass the operations of Government, there can be no ground for exculpating you from the guilt of libelling, for the base and degrading object of making a stipend by your crime. If there had been no other imputation upon you, the Court, as protecting the purity and peace of the public mind, would have felt itself called on to punish you severely. It is strange that a man who mixes so much in general and private life, as you do, should not see that such acts, as those for which you have been tried, are only productive of mischief to every mind that is influenced by them; and that they necessarily terminate in punishment on the guilty authors. It is strange that experience should not have taught you, and that you should be only advancing in a continual progress of malignity. What were the circumstances which you distorted in your libel? the whole intention of which was to throw disgrace on the Government, and to disgust and alienate the army. If you had anything to offer in extenuation, you might have offered it; the Court would have received it; and, at all events, impartial justice would have been dealt to you. I now pass the sentence of the Court upon you, William Cobbett, as the principal criminal amongst those who now stand before the Court: the Court do accordingly adjudge that you, William Cobbett, pay to our Lord the King a fine of 1000*l.*; that you be imprisoned in His Majesty's gaol of

Newgate for the space of two years, and that at the expiration of that time, you enter into a recognizance to keep the peace for seven years—yourself in the sum of 3000*l.*, and two good and sufficient sureties in the sum of 1000*l.* each; and further, that you be imprisoned till that recognizance be entered into, and that fine paid."

Mr. Hansard was then sentenced to three months' imprisonment in the King's Bench, and to enter into recognizances for three years. Mr. Budd and Mr. Bagshaw were each sent to the same prison for a period of two months.

A smile[5] arose on Cobbett's face as the terms of this dread sentence were unfolded,—a sentence which must needs either crush its victim into irrevocable ruin, or so press down upon an unknown and unsuspected buoyancy, as to bring upon its authors a recoil from the effects of which they would never escape.

From that hour, the sword which had been so near laying by to rust, had its blade new tempered, whilst the scabbard was clean cast away for ever.

[5] *Times*, July 10th.

CHAPTER XX.

"TO PUT A MAN IN PRISON FOR A YEAR OR TWO DOES NOT KILL HIM."

So the patriot was down. Down, among the felons. To keep company, for a period of two years, "with swindlers, and with persons convicted of the most detestable crimes," was he set down; unless he should ransom himself away from their immediate society. There he was, torn away from home, subjected to untold difficulties, financial and other, and deprived of liberty—in the cause of humanity and of national justice.

The absurdity of this outrageous sentence was soon manifest. The whole country cried "Shame!" Even the toad-eating ministerial newspapers were silent. Save mutilation, it was going back two hundred years.

Not that this was a solitary affair: there were other sufferers in durance vile, or with the prospect of it over their heads; and the existing generation had not forgotten the victims of 1792-4. But this

was so notorious: here was a man whose writings were patriotic, manly, eloquent;—and so far unsurpassed by those of any of his cotemporaries—bundled into jail for speaking the plain truth about public affairs, and proving it as he went along.

Exactly a year ago it had been openly declared that they were determined to crush him! And now the blow had fallen:—

"They thought that this savage sentence would break my heart, or at least silence me for ever. It was, indeed, a bloody stab. They thought they had got rid of me. Just after the verdict of *guilty* was found, Perceval met his brother-in-law Redesdale, at the portal of Westminster Hall. They shook hands, and gave each other joy! . . . . Curtis[1] met Tierney in the Hall: 'Ah! ah! we have got him at last,' said Curtis. 'Poor Cobbett! let him be bold now!' The old place-hunter answered, 'D—n him! I hope they'll squeeze him!' They did squeeze indeed; but their claws, hard as they were, did not squeeze hard enough. . . . The ruffians put me into prison in lucky time for me—put me into prison, and tied me to the stake of politics."

But let that pass. A prison is a prison. A convicted libeller is a convicted libeller. And, a convicted libeller having made his bed, let him lie upon it! The wretch should have taken into the

[1] Alderman Sir William Curtis, Member for the City of London. He had amassed great wealth as a war contractor, and was now a staunch supporter of the ministry.

account, when he made his stab at a merciful but just executive, that he ran the risk of being thrown into the enforced companionship of other villains. He had made his choice: it was not for him to complain that the logic of events had left him in jail, and that folks outside were laughing at him. Yes, let that pass, it is no concern of ours. That which it behoves us to consider—that which is infinitely more interesting to us—is this question, *What came of it all?*

In the first place, before Mr. Cobbett was released, flogging had become so discredited as to be nearly in desuetude, as regards the British army. Secondly, the degrading practice was totally abolished in the United States army, by Act of Congress of April 10th, 1812.

As was observed in a previous chapter, this topic was now uppermost in the public mind. And, as though sufficient warning had not been derived from the fate of Cobbett, a reckless provincial editor must needs court a similar martyrdom. This was Mr. Drakard, of the *Stamford News*, who admitted into his paper, of the 24th August, a bitter paragraph concerning "ONE THOUSAND LASHES;" a paragraph "of a nature so infamous, so seditious, and so dangerous, that no good man who heard it read could restrain his resentment," &c. Of course. So, as Mr. Drakard had made his bed, he might lie upon it; which he did, for

the space of eighteen months in Lincoln jail,[2]—for the sake of dear good men, who could not "restrain their resentment" at being told, that punishment and merciless barbarity were not convertible terms.

Those were, indeed, good old times. If there is anything, more than another, which stamps mediocrity upon the governing men of that day (not excepting the "first gent." himself), it is their persistent disregard of the affections of the people, as displayed in the measures entertained by the Legislature ;[3] the callosity of heart and mind with which they faced any appeal to the better feelings of human nature, on behalf of the unnumbered and unwashed.

At last, however, flogging was being deprecated. And it is due to Sir Francis Burdett, to record, that he was instrumental in bringing the attention of

[2] The *Examiner* copied this paragraph, and the proprietors were prosecuted, but the jury acquitted them.

[3] Take, as a specimen, the following proposal :—The Spilsby Poor Bill was a measure brought before Parliament, early in 1811, for the purpose of enabling the directors of the union to compel the poor, whether asking relief or not, to go into the workhouse. They were to be allowed to enter houses at their discretion to search for vagrants. They might commit to solitary imprisonment, without limit, the poor whom they collected, and *administer moderate correction* for misbehaviour ! (*Vide* Parliamentary Debates, March 26, 1811.) This brutal idea was soon snuffed out, at the instance of Sir Samuel Romilly ; but what a picture does it not present, of the combination of imbecility and cruelty which could rule the minds of some of the potential classes of society !

Parliament to the matter. He had moved, in 1808, without effect, that a return of floggings be presented to the House. Again, in 1811, he revived the subject, with the result that a clause found its way into the Mutiny Bill, having for its tendency the "lessening the quantity of flogging in the army." In the following Session, Burdett insisted upon the necessity of abolishing the practice altogether: vainly, however; although his action produced an unmistakable change in the tone of Government and its supporters.

During this discussion, in March, 1812, Mr. Brougham brought Cobbett's name into the proceedings, to the infinite disgust of some ministerial toad-eaters. They protested: they "felt extremely hurt that the indiscreet language of the learned gentleman should go out to the public, as bidding the army look up to Mr. Cobbett for redress, instead of to their own officers."

They had done better to leave Mr. Cobbett to his own native insignificance; and not rouse him, with his whipcord in hand:—

"Here is, even from the mouths of the Government themselves, an acknowledgment that it is a good thing to make the practice of flogging less general. This they have now distinctly avowed, that it is desirable to narrow this practice; and they boast of having, in some degree, succeeded by the means of a clause in the last year's Mutiny Act. Now then, said Mr. Brougham, if this

be the case, or as far as the good has gone, it is to be attributed to the press; and that, while those who were honest and bold enough to begin this battle in the cause of humanity; while those who fought the good fight and won an inestimable victory in that great cause; while Mr. Drakard and I were shut up in a prison, the Government were boasting of the success of a measure founded upon our principles. He added, that 'the legislature had been obliged, with respect to this question, to act upon the very principles of Mr. Cobbett, who was now in jail for his unseasonable declaration of them.' This seems to have given great offence to several members of the honourable House, who observed that the soldiers ought to be taught to THANK THEIR OFFICERS for the measure, and NOT MR. COBBETT! Oh, dear, no! That would be a sad thing! It would be a sad thing if the soldiers were to look to ME for redress; especially after my being sent to a felon's jail, which, of course, was to mark me out for a man to be shunned, rather than looked up to. The truth is, that this merit of having been the beginner of the battle in the cause of the soldiers does not belong to me. It belongs to Sir Francis Burdett. . . .

"Sir George Warrender describes Mr. Brougham as bidding the army look to me for redress instead of looking to their own officers. Why, really, I do not see why this should hurt the gentleman's feelings so much. What harm could it do? What could the public or the soldiers learn from any speech of Mr. Brougham more about me than they know already? They all know very well what I am in jail for. . . . The newspapers were kept full of me and my *crime* for the best part of a month; from the newspapers I and my crime got into the caricature shops; and, in short, while in jail myself, all those (and very

numerous they were), who were in hopes that I was gone to my last home, used every means in their power to blacken my character. . . .

"Surely Sir George Warrender might have trusted, in such a case, to the *understanding* of the army! He might surely have confided in their *taste* not to look up to me instead of their officers, especially after the repeated assurances of Sir Vicary Gibbs, that the army *despised* such writings as mine, and held their authors in abhorrence. After this, I think Sir George Warrender might have spared any expression of the wound given to his feelings at hearing language that tended to induce the army to *look up to me* instead of looking up to their own officers for redress. '*Indiscreet language!*' As if the subject had been all *tinder:* as if there had been imminent danger in even warning me, lest the soldiers should hear, or see, my name! Really, though sitting here in a jail, I can hardly help laughing at the idea."

"When it was known in America, that so heavy, so dreadful a sentence, had been passed upon me, a sentence which no man could regard as much short of death; a sentence surpassing in severity those for nineteen-twentieths of the *felonies;* when this sentence was heard of in America, where every creature was well acquainted with what I had there suffered from my devotion to my country, every one naturally felt eager to know *what I could have done* to merit such a sentence? And, when the people of that country came to see what it was; when they came to read the article, for the writing of which I was to be so heavily pnnished; when they came to consider the subject-matter of that publication, and to reflect on how they themselves might become interested in it,

there naturally came forth through the press an expression of some sentiments which have finally had their effect in producing the Act of Congress above inserted; and thus has the hateful practice of flogging men been abolished by law in a great and rising, and wonderfully-increasing nation. I do not pretend to say that the American Government would have had any desire to continue the practice of flogging, though the discussions on the subject had never taken place in England. On the contrary, I am of opinion that that Government was glad of an opportunity of getting rid of it; but I am of opinion that the thing would not have been thought of, had it not been for the discussions in England. Sir Vicary Gibbs was little apprehensive of these effects when he was prosecuting me; he could scarcely have hoped that his labours would be productive of consequences so important, so beneficial, and honourable to mankind; he hardly, I dare say, flattered himself that he was ensuring the extension of his renown through a whole continent of readers."

It was, then, no idle boast, that imprisonment need not kill, nor even seriously injure, a man: that a jail was "as good a place for study as any other." But, really, although the temporary loss of liberty is an unpleasant thing, considered in the abstract, there can be no possible objection to a man putting as good a face as he can on the matter. Life itself is nothing but a life-long struggle of a kindred character: to try and get an optimist view of bad circumstances. And, if one must needs take his daily exercise upon the leads of Newgate prison, instead of through his coppices

and cornfields: if he must get his "violets and primroses, and cowslips and harebells," sent up by the carrier, because of their extreme rarity in the street below; let him thank a propitious Heaven for so much!

In point of fact, few prisoners were ever so blessed as Cobbett. The reader is familiar enough (from the pages of "Advice," &c.) with the current of domestic joy that kept flowing. But, besides having one or other of his family continually with him, there were always sympathizing visitors: personal friends, business acquaintances, deputations from clubs and societies all over the kingdom. And, what was of no little importance, Matthew Wood was sheriff, who attended, in every possible way, to the comfort of his prisoner. Baron Maseres[4] came frequently, and "always in his wig and gown, in order, as he said, to show his abhorrence of the sentence."

[4] Francis Maseres (1731—1824), Cursitor Baron of the Exchequer, came of a Huguenot family, and was a man of high cultivation, being especially distinguished for his mathematical attainments and his knowledge of English constitutional history. Although his name is now almost forgotten, he produced a number of short essays and treatises on his favourite subjects, many of which, however, are buried away in the newspapers of his time, Cobbett's *Porcupine* being one to which he contributed. Maseres was a moderate Reformer, and what opinions he had were rather allowed to filtrate through his own select circle of friends than pushed forward into naked notoriety. He pursued a quiet, intellectual life, and devoted a large portion of his means to charitable and liberal purposes. Cobbett never mentions his name without affectionate reverence.

"I was hardly arrived when the brave old Major Cartwright came. . . . . You [PETER WALKER, of Worth, Sussex] were the next to arrive; and when, by dint of money, I had obtained the favour to be put into a room by myself, you hurried home, and brought me bedstead, chairs, tables, bedding, and everything; and I think I see you now, stripped in your shirt, putting the bedstead together and making up my bed. During the whole of the two years you never suffered me to be lonely; and your kindness was such, that when you found me engaged —when any one arrived—you instantly departed, unless pressed to stay. Thus proving that your visits arose solely from your desire to alleviate the sufferings of confinement. And, at the close of the period, though the sum was so enormous, and the period so long, you, with my excellent friend BROWN, voluntarily became my bail, and spoke of it, as he did, as an honour done to yourself."

And, as to his health, Cobbett would boast in after years that he never had even a headache for a moment; never enjoyed better health or spirits; never had hopes more lively, or thoughts more gay, than in that prison.

But that which, above all other matters, appeared to be the great solace of his prison-life, was the production of his famous work on the Currency, under the title of "Paper against Gold."[5] The tricks

[5] This work was begun shortly after Cobbett's arrival in Newgate. His contention was that the Bank could never again pay in specie or in paper at par, unless the interest on the Funds was reduced. The loans having been contracted to a large extent in

and contrivances by which paper-money had been, along with the funding system, made the means of

paper, this seemed reasonable enough; and the idea was generally accepted among the classes who suffered so severely from monetary pressure during subsequent years, although others thought it was "sapping the foundations of public morality," and so on.

The first letter appeared in the *Register* of Sept. 1, 1810, under the title of "Paper against Gold; being an Examination of the Report of the Bullion Committee; in a Series of Letters to the Tradesmen and Farmers in and near Salisbury." It was afterwards reprinted in full, with additions, under the title of "Paper against Gold, and Glory against Prosperity" (retail price, twenty shillings, in paper money).

During the remainder of Cobbett's life, he was always at battledore and shuttlecock over the Currency question. A passage from one of his American *Registers* was one that he was especially fond of sending up, in which he declared that it would be impossible to carry Peel's Bill of 1819 into full effect, and wound up with an offer to Castlereagh to have leave "to lay me on a gridiron and broil me alive, while Sidmouth may stir the coals, and Canning stand by and laugh at my groans." The Bill did take effect, after a fashion, but with tremendous difficulties in its train; and the feast of the gridiron came off at last, on the 9th of April, 1826, not in the style that was originally proposed, but in the shape of a dinner at the London Tavern. For a full account of it see the *Morning Herald* of the following day.

Another bit of humour was an attempt in verse:—

"Of paper coin how vast the pow'r!
It breaks or makes us in an hour.
And thus, perhaps, a beggar's shirt,
When finely ground and clear'd of dirt,
Then recompress'd by hand or hopper,
And printed on by sheet of copper,
May raise ten beggars to renown,
And tumble fifty nobles down!"

When Cobbett took the house at 183, Fleet Street, he prepared a big gridiron as a shop-sign, and also headed his journal with a woodcut of that utensil.

placing unwieldy fortunes in the hands of speculators, was his utter abhorrence. The glory was departed from England, in his eyes, if public credit were to hang upon the prosperity of the few, as against the multitude. And, regarding a fictitious currency, shifting in value from day to day, sometimes even from hour to hour, as a leading cause of the debt which was accumulating to such a terrible figure,—he resolved to devote a part of his newly-found leisure to the systematizing of his thought upon the subject.

Accordingly, upon the 1st of September, he commenced a series of papers, founded upon the recent report of the Bullion Committee; tracing the history of the National Debt, and of the schemes for raising money which had been in vogue during the war.

Here is his story (told in 1822) of the first conception of the plan, and his notion of its value:—

"The next day after Gibbs, Ellenborough, and their associates, had got me safe in Newgate, an American friend of mine, who had the clearest and soundest head of almost any man I ever knew in my life, and for whom I had and still have a very great personal regard, came to see me in a very miserable hole, though better than that to which I had been sentenced, and from which I finally ransomed myself at the expense, for *lodging* alone, of 1200*l.* Being seated, one of us on each side of a little bit of a table, he said, looking up into my face, with his arms folded upon the edge of the table, 'Well! they have *got*

you at last. And now, what will you do?' After a moment or two I answered, 'What do you think I ought to do?' He then gave me his opinion, and entered pretty much into a sort of plan of proceedings. I heard him out, and then I spoke to him in much about these words: 'No, Dickins, that will never do. This nation is drunk, it is mad as a March hare, and mad it will be till this beastly frolic (*the war*) is over. The only mode of proceeding, to get satisfaction, requires great patience. The nation must suffer at last, and greatly and dreadfully suffer, and in that suffering it will come to its reason, and to that justice of sentiment, which are now wholly banished. I shall make no immediate impression by tracing the paper-system to its deadly root. The common people will stare at me, and the rich ruffians will swear; but the time must come when all will listen; and my plan is to write that *now* which I can hold up to the teeth of my insolent enemies, and taunt them with in the hour of their distress. . . . . .' I then described to him the outline of what I intended to do with regard to the paper-system; and after passing a very pleasant afternoon, during which we selected and rejected several titles, we at last fixed upon that of *Paper against Gold*, which I began to write and to publish in a few weeks afterwards, and which, at the end of thirteen years, I hold up to the noses of the insolent foes who then exulted over me, and tell them, 'This is what you got by my having been sentenced to Newgate: this was the produce of that deed by which it was hoped and believed, that I was pressed down never to be able to stir again. . . . .' This was a new epoch in the progress of my mind. I now bent my whole force to one object, regarding everything else as of no consequence at all. The pursuits of agriculture and gardening filled

up the moments of mere leisure and relaxation. Other topics than that of paper-money came now and then to make a variety; but this was the main thing. I never had any hope in anything else; and nothing else was an object of my care."

So the attempt to crush him was a failure. Rather, they read defiance in every page; and, as time wore on, it was seen that the silence of defeat was on the side of Mr. Cobbett's foes. The Press ignored him; that Press which had, from envy at his superior talents and his unexampled success, ransacked the vocabulary of Billingsgate in order to abuse a man they could not answer; which had so goaded and inflamed the persecuting spirit of the time, that none dared speak or write who were not sheltered by privilege, or who had not bartered independence for the favour of those in power. Not for several years after this date was there much desire shown, on the part of a ministerial writer, to attract the glance of this rampant lion.

And they might well be quiet. If this imprisonment had neither killed nor cured him, Mr. Cobbett came out of Newgate an altered man. He was now fifty years of age, and a few grey hairs were just appearing. The enormous expenses which he had been put to (amounting, from first to last, to more than six thousand pounds), and the discovery that his business affairs were hopelessly involved, made up a bundle of difficulties which began to

tell upon his temper. Good-natured sarcasms made place for bitter ones; and an air of spitefulness would come over his writings when there was more than ordinary cause for resentment. His essays were, albeit brilliant as ever, sometimes marred by the introduction of coarse epithets; and, during the remainder of his career, this cause alone sufficed to estrange many of his friends, and to put a stone into the hand of opponents.

Mr. Cobbett's writing must be considered as at its very best during the years 1810-12. He probably gave some time to revision; a point which he had been inclined to neglect, and a matter concerning which he seemed utterly heedless in later years; the exclusive devotion to his pen, now so far removed from rural distractions, necessarily produced better work.

But it cannot be said that there was any deterioration in Cobbett's literary style, beyond the warmth of expression engendered by fiercer animosity. The best known works of William Cobbett belong to the last twenty years of his life; and if they are painfully full of personal hatreds, it must be recollected that those were, indeed, times to try men's souls; the oppressor and the oppressed had seldom been, in England, in such close conflict; and a leader and guider of men, on the side of the latter, had need to be fierce and uncompromising. The soldier, foremost of your storming-party, has

little time to spare for consideration of the personal merits of the foe, whose gunstock is swinging o'er his head.

The more serious result, personally, of the sentence pronounced upon Mr. Cobbett, was the utter collapse of his pecuniary fortunes. The enormous profit derived from the publication of the *Register* might have been sufficient to cover even the profuse expenditure of Botley House, with its hospitality and its planting experiments, but Mr. Cobbett was eminently a person who (as the Hebrew poet has it) earned money to put it into a bag with holes.

This matter, however, might be passed over with light notice, but for its interference with Cobbett's public services. His is not a solitary instance of a useful life being marred, and its efficiency hindered, by an ignorance of the value of money; and there could hardly be a more decisive evidence of the disastrous results of such ignorance than is presented by this man's career. PLUTUS is the most exacting of deities; his votaries must be whole-hearted; let FORTUNA come and cast off her shoes as she may. . . .

It was never Cobbett's aim to get rich. He had, indeed, hoped to provide a snug competence for his children; but for plans of amassing wealth he had supreme contempt. To earn by labour, and to

circulate the proceeds, was his economy; and it cannot be denied that, with proper prudence, that is the right economy. The greatest enemy to national prosperity is the plutocrat; and the next greatest is he who can afford, in the prime of life, to live without labour, through the mistaken munificence or benevolence of another.

It would appear, then, that upon accounts being looked into, in the autumn of 1810, money affairs were found to be almost hopelessly entangled. The three great serial works,—the "Debates," "Parliamentary History," and "State Trials," were being produced at a ruinous loss; while the accommodation-paper, chiefly in the hands of Mr. Swann, amounted to thousands of pounds. Cobbett had not looked at his balance for six years! His practice was to ask Mr. Wright to send him ten, twenty, or forty pounds as he wanted it; and to leave the rest of the matter implicitly to him. Wright was, himself, not very clever in the management of money; and, between the two, there came at last the profoundest muddle. It ended in an arbitration, held in the prison; the result being a heavy award against Wright, and a total and irremediable rupture of their friendship. Mr. Budd bought up a large portion of the publications in stock; while Mr. Hansard took into his own hands the three serials which he had been printing for Cobbett.

The quarrel with Mr. Wright is the most painful episode in Cobbett's life. There can be no doubt that Wright had been a reckless agent, and had been trusted far too much; and his conduct, some years after, in producing an old, long-forgotten, private letter of Cobbett's, to serve electioneering purposes, was so infamous a breach of confidence, that it may well be believed that his employer's imputation of dishonesty had foundation in actual fact. Of this matter we shall unhappily hear more in the sequel.[6] The following letter to Mr. Swann (dated Newgate, January 26, 1811) may be selected as best illustrating the existing condition of affairs :—

"I find, from Mr. Bagshaw, that one of the notes, given by him to you, or at least accepted by him, at our settlement and renewal of bills, under the auspices of Wright, is coming due on Tuesday (I believe it is), and we have no money to pay it. You remember that he told me that all these notes were given for books bought by Budd and Bagshaw. As it happens, the former was nearly true; but, as to the latter, not a shilling was due on that account. The whole was a fraud upon me, in order to make me believe that the works had sold to this extent; and his view was to get an assignment of the stock, and leave me to pay myself as I could. I have now an abundance of *bonâ fide* notes, but no money; every sixpence being

[6] Mr. Wright employed his later years in miscellaneous literary work, and died in the year 1844. For a notice of him, *vide Gentleman's Magazine* of that year.

swallowed by the notes left unpaid and unrenewed at the time you were here. A series of such unprincipled conduct I never either knew or heard of; but I am aware that my having been a dupe is no justification for me with you. Within these five weeks I have not had an hour's peace; but I have obtained forbearance from those whom I could not pay, and have avoided, except with you, putting my name to any new bill. My wife knows all about the matter; and plenty of vexation it has given her. I imagine I can pay this first note in about a fortnight; but I am sure the others will come too fast upon me. If you could come to town in ten days, I think we could so settle the matter, as for it not to be at all, or at least but very little inconvenient to you, and to relieve my mind from a load of vexation and anxiety that is really intolerable.

"The works are all going on well. I have made a revolution here at any rate. I have not seen Wright this fortnight; but I make him send every word of copy to *me*. I have dismissed his journeyman-authors and bottle-companions, and have set him to work for his bread. And work he shall, or I will dismiss him. Considerable as my property is, I had been well-nigh ruined, if I had not come to jail. Let me have a line from you. Mrs. Cobbett joins me in kindest regards to Mrs. Swann and your dear children. We thank you very much for the pig; but I thank you still more for your last kind and affectionate letter, the words of which, and the whole of your conduct, have made an impression upon my heart that never will be effaced. Amongst the other acts of this man was an attempt to put an end to *our* connexion, when once he had got you to take the notes; but he was silenced by an indignant rejection of the hint on my part. The

best way will be to say little about the matter anywhere; for the shame of being so duped is mine.

"God bless you, and give you health, and the like to your family."

It was all too late, however. Years of prosperity, with concurrent retrenchment, might have staved off ruin. But, as the ensuing period in the history of England was one of continued disaster to most persons who were not paid out of the taxes, Mr. Cobbett shared the fate of all persons who were not prepared for the storm; and his pecuniary affairs only got from bad to worse. As for the 6500*l.* due from Wright under the arbitration, there was not the ghost of a chance of that ever being paid.

Under the circumstances, then, it is not surprising to learn that he had already accepted the proffered assistance of his political friends. Colonel Bosville gave him 1000*l.* as a set-off against some electioneering expenses he had been put to over Mr. Paull; Burdett advanced a large sum chiefly for the purpose of settling with Mr. Swann; and, at last, when the fine had to be paid, it would appear that Cobbett owed the ability to do so to the generosity of another. This disposition to support him and his cause showed itself, however, from the very first, and from all quarters. Even his opponents could not fail to admit the severity of the sentence;[7] while his friends not only offered

[7] "You will readily imagine that the sentence of our friend was

their sympathy, but proposed a public subscription on his behalf—a proposal, however, which Cobbett declined, at the same time suggesting that those who wished to assist him could not do better than buy the *Register*.

The end came at last. In compliment to Mr. Cobbett's untiring industry, and the abundant material provided for its exercise, Old Time had worn his fleetest pair of wings. And on the 8th July, 1812, his last paper in Newgate announced that he had "just paid a thousand pounds to the king: and much good may it do his majesty!"

On the following day, being released, a grand dinner was given at the "Crown and Anchor," in order to celebrate the occasion; and, as though Fate were determined that he should have no interval of peace, as soon as he had regained his liberty, the opportunity must needs be taken to remind Mr. Cobbett that his opinions had changed from time to time. Burdett took the chair, presiding over some six hundred guests, and the thing was fairly successful, notwithstanding an attempt made to create discord between Cobbett and the chairman of the evening. There was no blinking the fact, however, that Cobbett had lost some friends over the vacillation

very grievous indeed to me. Everybody that I have seen, even Mr. C.'s enemies, declare it to be too severe. I hope and trust it will not, however, damp his ardour. . . . . I was very glad to see, by the last *Register*, that Mr. Cobbett's spirit is by no means cowed."—J. Swann to J. Wright, July 13 and 20, 1810.

which he had displayed while within the grasp of Vicary Gibbs; but the ungenerous mortal, who brought the matter forward at the dinner, had no support from his audience; and, indeed, all the leaders among the Reformists [8] had condoned the momentary weakness.

Mr. Cobbett's release was celebrated, in several places in England, by a public meeting of one kind or other. And as he journeyed homeward, his reception was well-calculated to add to the felicities of the day. At Alton, the bells were set ringing; at Winchester he was stopped to be again entertained at dinner; and, on nearing home, he found the people of Botley had come out in goodly assemblage to meet him, and to listen to his story.

[8] Excepting Mr. Leigh Hunt. The *Examiner* again took up its tale about Mr. Cobbett's "dastardly spirit," which, it was quite clear, still existed, for the latter had not dared to whisper a syllable against the pernicious habits of the Prince of Wales, nor against the reappointment of the Duke of York. Cobbett was at the same time charged, by the same writer, with "almost holding up the murderer of Perceval to applause and imitation"—a statement which was the *exact opposite* to the truth. A further insinuation, that Lord Cochrane held guineas up to the electors, was of similar malignity and worthlessness. A pamphlet appeared, about this time, upbraiding those who had been latterly seizing upon the opportunity to vilify Cobbett's character: "An Examination of the Attacks upon the Political Character of Mr. Cobbett," by George Buckler (London, 1812).

CHAPTER XXI.

"THE NATION NEVER CAN BE ITSELF AGAIN WITHOUT A REFORM."

THERE is reason to believe that Mr. Cobbett now began seriously to entertain the idea of getting into Parliament. Beyond, however, an address to the electors of Hampshire, in the autumn of 1812, no active step was yet taken. Mr. George Rose was all-powerful in the county, the constituency being thus practically in ministerial hands. One appearance on the nomination-day was enough to satisfy Mr. Cobbett of the hopelessness of a contest.

His return to Botley revealed one great change in sentiment; the parsons were dead against him. This was undeserved, as Cobbett had always been a good, quiet churchman; had written vigorously in support of tithes, and the prior claim to them of the clergy and the poor, as against the Howards, the Russells, and the Greys; and had had many

friends amongst the clergy. This new alienation may, however, be due to a circumstance which occurred just before Cobbett's release ;—it was certainly so in one case.

Mr. Daniel Eaton, a small bookseller, and an old offender against established opinion, had recently stood in the pillory for an hour,—that being part of his punishment for selling Paine's "Age of Reason." There was much public sympathy with him, the populace actually trying to serve him with "refreshments." Cobbett had formed pretty strong opinions concerning this degrading punishment, but very much stronger ones concerning the Attorney-General as a prosecutor ; and that learned gentleman having foreboded the "consequences, dreadful in the extreme," which must follow if Paine's religious principles were suffered to take root, Mr. Cobbett suggested that there would be no better way of averting these consequences than by an answer to the book. "And have we 20,000 clergymen, and will no one of them attempt to give us this answer?" he said. He would call upon his own spiritual pastor, the Rector of Botley, the Rev. Richard Baker.

Mr. Baker consented to undertake the task, but almost immediately withdrew the offer; upon which, Mr. Cobbett reminded him of his ordination vows, and generally played with him, in his own manner, making the poor parson look rather ridiculous.

So, upon his return home, Mr. Cobbett was not welcomed by his spiritual adviser; who even went so far as to refuse the keys of the belfry to those persons who, just then, were so desirous of adding all they could to the clamour of rejoicing.

The Rev. Mr. Baker is a character, in his way. There are some sad stories of him in Cobbett's *Register*, which the reader may discover, if his tastes lie in that direction. How he was horse-whipped in the public street,—how he actually professed disbelief in Revelation, while declining to meet the consequences of a public admission of the same,—how he cheated at market, and so on.[1]

There were many such characters in the Church in those deadened days, who, when they entered into the lively election contests of the time, would lead the way of violence. Your political parson could be a famous "rough," when opportunity served.

[1] This reverend gentleman's memory is still green, down at Botley. T—— (*æt.* 81) will tell you of his being horsewhipped by the parish doctor; and of his being called by Mr. Cobbett an abominable liar, at which the assembled villagers cheered. Baker wanted the parish clerk to thrash his wife for not going to church, and showed him the size of stick with which he might legally do it. He was forthwith told to try it on Mrs. Baker first. H—— (*æt.* 78) will call to mind the doctor and the parson "having sparring-bouts together in the vestry." This man tells a good story about Cobbett, who wanted his people to work, on some special occasion, on a Sunday, agreeing beforehand to pay them double. The day's work being done, a grand dinner was provided, during which C. went round the table and put everybody's money in front of him. This being done, he said, "Now, if you do go to h—— for working on a Sunday, don't go and say you ben't paid!"

So Mr. Cobbett had made another set of enemies —the very set, too, who, if they had given themselves a moment's opportunity for consideration, would have discovered that he, of all public men, was the one who could serve their cause the best. Instead of that, numbers of the clergy started up as anti-Cobbettites, writing useless tracts on "disaffection," or meeting him at public gatherings, and trying to shout him down. And this sort of thing lasted as long as Cobbett lived; the clergy never made friends with him again; there were far too many idle shepherds, who thought their interest must suffer if a misguided populace had all that it asked; and who, consequently, resisted Reform with all their might and main.

The country squires were dreading, too, the possible effects of Mr. Cobbett's vigorous writings.

His influence amongst the middle-classes was increasing; and the artisans and labourers were beginning to club together to buy the *Register*; readers were more numerous than ever.[2] But the

[2] News from the provinces, in February, 1814:—

"Hampshire.—Mr. Cobbett continues to write his celebrated *Political Register* from his estate at Botley, in this county, uniting in his own person, in their completest sense, the character of agriculturist, patriot, and man of letters. Some of his late numbers, on the novel positions and pretensions of the belligerent powers, are distinguished above all his former writings for their masculine eloquence, power of reasoning, and courageous delineation of truth."—*Monthly Magazine*, xxxvii. 93.

landed interest could not, or would not, understand him. The farmer could not see the identity of interest which properly existed between himself and his labourers; and the man who preached this theme was, of course, not to be trusted when dealing with other topics. He told them that ruin was impending; that, immediately upon a cessation of the war, prices would go down, and the consequences would be disastrous. There was no chance of escape, but by immediate Reform, by which means there should be a searching reduction in the public expenditure. The poor-rates were now nearly eight millions. Government annuitants were swelling their numbers with every year of war; dignitaries of state had higher salaries, and courtiers larger pensions; army-contractors and stock-jobbers were swallowing up the wealth of the country, and elbowing out the squires.

So, when the Corn Bill was proposed, Mr. Cobbett was standing alone again, or very nearly alone.[3] In vain did he point out that it would tend to keep up the high price of food, which was already driving the able-bodied out of the country; that the principal reason for keeping up high prices was, that the land might continue to

[3] Cobbett got up a requisition for a county meeting, but the High Sheriff refused to entertain the plan. Being thus foiled, he actually sent up a petition to the House of Lords, praying them not to pass any law to prohibit or restrain the importation of corn. Earl Stanhope was prepared to present the petition, but received it too late.

pay the exorbitant taxes, and so continue to support a multitude of idlers. The Corn Bill became law; peace was signed, but plenty came not along with it; and the farmers straightway fell to pieces, dragging all the industry of the country along with them.

During these three or four years (1812—1816), there was more revolution in personal property in England, than there had been seen, in the same space of time, since the Restoration. The terrible load which weighed upon the people may be judged of by the fact that Cobbett was paying, the year after the war, several hundred pounds in direct and indirect taxes. It is not difficult, then, to understand how intolerable would be the burden upon the land, for people whose only resource was the land; and all the more so, that inflated prosperity had engendered improvidence. Tea, coffee, wine, spirits, and other exciseable articles had taken the place of beer on the tables of the farmers; their wives and daughters had found sofas, carpets, and parlour-bells necessary to existence. A generation had grown up which must needs *send* its butter and eggs to market, instead of carrying them; silk stockings had usurped those of worsted; the fashions were finding their way into the farm-houses. So, in a little while, the poor farmers were breaking stones on the highway by hundreds.

But, if the LAND did not, as yet, understand Mr. Cobbett, the WORKSHOP did. Very soon after he came out of prison, he drew the attention of his readers to the ominous disturbance at Nottingham, on the part of the Luddites. The change which had come over the people—that they should break machinery, disturb the peace, and refuse to sing "God save the King"—was ominous indeed. But how did this come to pass? Not all at once: these things (he pointed out) had been growing up by degrees. Disloyalty and misgovernment ever went hand in hand. The people were beginning to see that the governing classes were occupied, as much as any traders, in looking exclusively after their own interests, and the interests of their adherents.

For an effectual remedy, then, there could only be a reform in the Representation of the people. No innovation: but Reform. No republicanism: but the ancient Constitution. "The nation never can be itself again without a Reform," was Cobbett's repeated cry,—echoed, at last, by millions of people.[4]

[4] "At this time [1816] the writings of William Cobbett suddenly became of great authority; they were read on nearly every cottage hearth in the manufacturing districts of South Lancashire, in those of Leicester, Derby, and Nottingham; also in many of the Scotch manufacturing towns. Their influence was speedily visible; he directed his readers to the true cause of their sufferings—misgovernment; and to its proper corrective—Parliamentary reform. Riots soon became scarce, and from that time they have never obtained

The brave, the undaunted Lord Cochrane was one of Mr. Cobbett's coadjutors. They had been near neighbours for many years past; and when the gallant sailor was ashore, many had been the sports which they had seen together. Cochrane's candidature for Westminster always had the valuable support of the *Register*; and, when the foul charge was got up against him (purely from political motives) which hung like a nightmare over the rest of his long life, there was no support of his cause equal to the pages of that intrepid journal. So the two men kept together—had long and earnest conferences over the miserable and degraded condition of their country; and worked and waited for the day that must surely come after all this suffering. The nation was now entering upon the most disgraceful period of its history: with a disreputable "first gent" in the chief seat; the pretenders to statesmanship divided into two rival factions, concerning which it can only be said that one was in place and had control over the country's resources, and the other was out of place; and the mass of the people in a condition,

their ancient vogue with the labourers of this country. . . . . Instead of riots and destruction of property, Hampden clubs were now established in many of our large towns and the villages and districts around them. Cobbett's books were printed in a cheap form; the labourers read them, and thenceforward became deliberate and systematic in their proceedings."—Samuel Bamford: "Passages in the Life of a Radical" (London, 1844).

comparable only to that presented by the inhabitants of a hive of bees, in autumn, when their winter store passes into the hands of other than the providers.

One day, in September, 1816, after a spring and summer of much trial, during which the country was kept alarmed by acts of violence; mills, frames, and threshing-machines being destroyed, and ricks of corn laid hands on, either by fire or thieves; Cobbett had been talking to his neighbour on these burning topics. They both agreed that, if the people could but be enabled to see the matter in its true light, there would be "an end to all such acts of violence, at once; and of course, to the ignominious deaths of fathers and sons, and the miseries of wives, children, and parents, produced in the end by these acts of violence." Lord Cochrane's suggestion was, that it was in the power of Mr. Cobbett to effect this purpose, by writing an essay upon the subject; and, if the price of the *Register* could for that occasion be reduced to twopence, the desired object would be obtained.

"I said, before we parted, that this should be done. But, as it was impossible for me to prove to the people what was *not* the cause of their misery, without proving to them what *was* the cause . . . without pointing out the *remedy:* as the remedy, at last, came to a Reform of Parliament; and, as I still feared that the best time was

not come for urging on this great question, I delayed, from time to time, the fulfilment of my promise to my neighbour, who, on his part, never saw me without pressing me hard upon the subject; and on the 2nd of November, I wrote the No. 18, being an 'Address to the Journeymen and Labourers' on the aforementioned subjects."

There were misgivings as to the probable success of this effort: that there would be serious loss in its production, and that it would be premature; irresolution went so far as to countermand the instructions to the printer. Futile misgivings these! Before the end of the month, forty-four thousand copies had been sold of the first cheap *Register*.

And, reader, if you glance at some portions of this splendid essay, you will not wonder at the uproar that ensued; the enthusiastic reception on the part of the "lower orders;" the terror on the part of officialism and prescription; the renewed malignity of the envious press. The effect of this popularizing of the *Political Register* was prodigious, as we shall see; and as you will understand, if all the numbers were anything like this first one.

"To the Journeymen and Labourers of England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, on the cause of their present miseries; on the measures which have produced that cause; on the remedies which some foolish and some cruel and insolent men have proposed; and on the line of conduct which journeymen and labourers ought to

pursue, in order to obtain effectual relief, and to assist in promoting the tranquillity, and restoring the happiness of their country.

"Friends and Fellow-Countrymen,—

"Whatever the pride of rank, of riches, or of scholarship, may have induced some men to believe, or to affect to believe, the real strength and all the resources of a country ever have sprung, and ever must spring, from the *labour* of its people, and hence it is, that this nation, which is so small in numbers, and so poor in climate and soil compared with many others, has, for many ages, been the most powerful nation in the world: it is the most industrious, the most laborious, and, therefore, the most powerful. Elegant dresses, superb furniture, stately buildings, fine roads and canals, fleet horses and carriages, numerous and stout ships, warehouses teeming with goods; all these, and many other objects that fall under our view, are so many works of national wealth and resources. But all these spring from *labour*. Without the journeyman and the labourer none of them could exist; without the assistance of their hands, the country would be a wilderness, hardly worth the notice of an invader.

"As it is the labour of those who toil which makes a country abound in resources, so it is the same class of men who must, by their arms, secure its safety, and uphold its fame. Titles and immense sums of money have been bestowed upon numerous naval and military commanders. Without calling the justice of these in question, we may assert that the victories were obtained by you and your fathers, and brothers and sons, in co-operation with those commanders, who, with *your* aid, have done great and

wonderful things; but who, without that aid, would have been as impotent as children at the breast.

"With this correct idea of your own worth in your minds, with what indignation must you hear yourselves called the populace, the rabble, the mob, the swinish multitude; and with what greater indignation, if possible, must you hear the projects of these cool, and cruel, and insolent men, who, now that you have been, without any fault of yours, brought into a state of misery, propose to narrow the limits of parish relief, to prevent you from marrying in the days of your youth, or to thrust you out to seek your bread in foreign lands, never more to behold your parents or friends? But, suppress your indignation, until we return to this topic, after we have considered the *cause* of your present misery, and the measures which have produced that cause.

"The times in which we live are full of peril. The nation, as described by the very creatures of the Government, is fast advancing to that period when an important change must take place. It is the lot of mankind, that some shall labour with their limbs, and others with their minds; and, on all occasions, more especially on an occasion like the present, it is the duty of the latter to come to the assistance of the former. We are all equally interested in the peace and happiness of our common country. It is of the utmost importance, that in the seeking to obtain those objects, our endeavours should be uniform, and tend all to the same point. Such an uniformity cannot exist without an uniformity of sentiment as to public matters, and to produce this unformity is the object of this address.

"As to the cause of our present miseries, it is *the enormous amount of the taxes*, which the Government com-

pels us to pay for the support of its army, its placemen, its pensioners, &c., and for the payment of the interest of its debt. That this is the real cause has been a thousand times proved; and it is now so acknowledged by the creatures of the Government themselves. Two hundred and five of the correspondents of the Board of Agriculture ascribe the ruin of the country to *taxation*. Numerous writers, formerly the friends of the Pitt system, now declare, that taxation has been the cause of our distress. Indeed, when we compare our present state to the state of the country previous to the wars against France, we must see that our present misery is owing to no other cause. The taxes then annually raised amounted to about fifteen millions: they amounted last year to seventy millions. The nation was then happy: it is now miserable.

* * * * *

"It has been attempted to puzzle you with this sort of question: 'If taxes be the cause of the people's misery, how comes it that they were not so miserable before the taxes were reduced as they are now?' Here is a fallacy, which you will be careful to detect. I know that the taxes have been reduced, that is to say, *nominally* reduced, but not so in fact; on the contrary, they have in reality been greatly augmented. This has been done by *the sleight of hand* of paper-money. Suppose, for instance, that four years ago I had 100 pounds to pay in taxes, then 130 bushels of wheat would have paid my share. If I have *now* seventy-five pounds to pay in taxes, it will require 190 bushels of wheat to pay my share of taxes. Consequently, though my taxes are nominally reduced, they are, in reality, greatly augmented. This has been done by the legerdemain of paper-money. In 1812, the

pound note was worth only thirteen shillings in silver. It is now worth twenty shillings. Therefore, when we now pay a pound note to the tax-gatherer, we really pay him twenty shillings, where we before paid him thirteen shillings; and the fund-holders who lent pound notes worth thirteen shillings each, are now paid their interest in pounds worth twenty shillings each. And the thing is come to what Sir Francis Burdett told the parliament it would come to. He told them, in 1811, that if they ever attempted to pay the interest of their debt in gold and silver, or in paper-money equal in value to gold and silver, the farmers and tradesmen must be ruined, and the journeymen and labourers reduced to the last stage of misery.

"Thus, then, it is clear that it is the weight of the taxes, under which you are sinking, which has already pressed so many of you down into the state of paupers, and which now threatens to deprive many of you of your existence. We next come to consider what have been *the causes* of this weight of taxes. Here we must go back a little in our history; and you will soon see that this intolerable weight has all proceeded from *the want of a parliamentary Reform.*

"In the year 1764, soon after the present king came to the throne, the annual interest of the debt amounted to about five millions, and the whole of the taxes to about nine millions. But, soon after this, a war was entered on to compel the Americans to submit to be taxed by the parliament, *without being represented in that parliament.* The Americans triumphed, and, after the war was over, the annual interest of the debt amounted to about nine millions, and the whole of the taxes to about fifteen millions. This was our situation when the French

people began their Revolution. The French people had so long been the slaves of a despotic Government, that the friends of freedom in England rejoiced at their emancipation. The cause of *reform*, which had never ceased to have supporters in England for a great many years, now acquired new life, and the Reformers urged the parliament to *grant reform*, instead of going to war against the people of France. The Reformers said: 'Give the nation *reform*, and you need fear no *revolution*.' The parliament, instead of listening to the Reformers, crushed them, and went to war against the people of France; and the consequence of these wars is, that the annual interest of the debt now amounts to forty-five millions, and the whole of the taxes, during each of the last several years, to seventy millions. So that these wars have added thirty-six millions a year to the interest of the debt, and fifty-five millions a year to the amount of the whole of the taxes! This is the price that we have paid for having checked (for it is only *checked*) the progress of liberty in France; for having forced upon that people the family of Bourbon, and for having enabled another branch of that same family to restore the bloody Inquisition which Napoleon had put down."

After a graphic sketch of the oppressions and the struggles, which obtained in France, and which produced the great Revolution, the writer proceeds:—

"It seems, at first sight, very strange that the Government should not have taken warning in time. But it had so long been in the habit of *despising the people*, that its mind was incapable of entertaining any notion of danger

from the oppressions heaped upon them. It was surrounded with panders and parasites, who told it nothing but flattering falsehoods; and it saw itself supported by 250,000 bayonets, which it thought irresistible. . . . And if you ask me how the ministers, and the noblesse, and the priesthood, who generally know pretty well how to take care of themselves; if you ask me how it came to pass that they did not *take warning in time*, I answer, that they *did* take warning, but that, seeing that the change which was coming would deprive them of a great part of their power and emoluments, they resolved to *resist the change*, and to destroy the country, if possible, rather than not have all its wealth and power to themselves.

* * * * *

"You have been represented by the *Times* newspaper, by the *Courier*, by the *Morning Post*, by the *Morning Herald*, and others, as the Scum of Society. They say that you have no business at public meetings; that you are rabble, and that you pay no taxes. These insolent hirelings, who wallow in wealth, would not be able to put their abuse of you in print, were it not for your labour. You create all that is an object of taxation; for, even the land itself would be good for nothing without your labour. But are you *not* taxed? Do you pay no taxes? One of the correspondents of the Board of Agriculture has said that care has been taken to lay as little tax as possible on the articles used by you. One would wonder how a man could be found impudent enough to put an assertion like this upon paper. But the people of this country have so long been insulted by such men, that the insolence of the latter knows no bounds.

"The tax-gatherers do not, indeed, come to you and

demand money of you; but there are few articles which you use, in the purchase of which you do not pay a tax. On your shoes, salt, beer, malt, hops, tea, sugar, candles, soap, paper, coffee, spirits, glass of your windows, bricks and tiles, tobacco. On all these, and many other articles, you pay a tax, and even on your loaf you pay a tax, because everything is taxed from which the loaf proceeds. In several cases the tax amounts to more than one-half of what you pay for the article itself; these taxes go, in part, to support sinecure placemen and pensioners; and the ruffians of the hired press call you the Scum of Society, and deny that you have any right to show your faces at any public meeting to petition for a Reform, or for the removal of any abuse whatever! Mr. Preston, whom I quoted before, and who is a member of parliament, and has a large estate, says upon this subject, 'Every family, even of the poorest labourer, consisting of five persons, may be considered as paying in indirect taxes, at least ten pounds a year, or more than half his wages at seven shillings a week!' And yet the insolent hirelings call you the *mob*, the *rabble*, the *scum*, the *swinish multitude*, and say that your voice is nothing; that you have no business at public meetings; and that you are, and ought to be, considered as nothing in the body politic! Shall we never see the day when these men will change their tone? Will they never cease to look upon you as brutes? I trust they will change their tone, and that the day of the change is *at no great distance!*

* * * * *

"With what feelings must you look upon the condition of your country, where the increase of the people is now looked upon as a curse! Thus, however, has it always

been, in all countries, where taxes have produced excessive misery. Our countryman, Mr. Gibbon, in his history of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, has the following passage :—

"'The horrid practice of murdering their new-born infants was become every day more frequent in the provinces. It was the effect of *distress*, and the distress was principally occasioned by the intolerable burden of taxes, and by the vexations as well as cruel prosecutions of the officers of the Revenue against their insolvent debtors. The less opulent or less industrious part of mankind, instead of rejoicing at an increase of family, deemed it an act of paternal tenderness to release the children from the impending miseries of a life which they themselves were unable to support.'

"But that which took place under the base Emperor Constantine, will not take place in England. You will not murder your new-born infants, nor will you, to please the corrupt and the insolent, debar yourselves from enjoyments to which you are invited by the very first of nature's laws. It is, however, a disgrace to the country, that men should be found in it, capable of putting ideas so insolent upon paper. So, then, a young man arm-in-arm with a rosy-cheeked girl, must be a spectacle of evil omen! What! and do they imagine that you are thus to be *extinguished*, because some of you are now (without any fault of yours) unable to find work? As far as you were wanted to labour, to fight, or to pay taxes, you were welcome, and they boasted of your numbers; but now that your country has been brought into a state of misery, these corrupt and insolent men are busied with schemes for getting rid of you. Just as if you had not as good a right to live, and to love, and to marry as they have!

They do not purpose—far from it—to check the breeding of sinecure placemen and pensioners, who are supported in part by the taxes which you help to pay. They say not a word about the *whole families* who are upon the pension list. In many cases, there are sums granted in trust for the children of such a lord or such a lady. And while labourers and journeymen, who have large families too, are actually paying taxes for the support of these lords' and ladies' children, these cruel and insolent men propose that they shall have no relief, and their having children ought to be *checked!* To such a subject no words can do justice. You will feel as you ought to feel; and to the effect of your feelings I leave these cruel and insolent men."

The following paragraph is against the republicans, of which there were many advocates, born of the troublous times:—

"I know of no enemy of reform, and of the happiness of the country, so great as that man who would persuade you that we possess *nothing good*, and that all must be torn to pieces. There is no principle, no precedent, no regulation (except as to mere matter of detail), favourable to freedom, which is not to be found in the laws of England or in the example of our ancestors. Therefore, I say, we may ask for, and we want, *nothing new*. We have great constitutional laws and principles, to which we are immovably attached. We want great *alteration*, but we want nothing new. Alteration, modification to suit the times and circumstances; but the great principles ought to be, and must be, the same, or else confusion will follow. It was the misfortune of the

French people, that they had no great and settled principles to refer to in their laws or history. They sallied forth and inflicted vengeance on their oppressors; but, for want of settled principles to which to refer, they fell into confusion; they massacred each other; they next flew to a military chief to protect them even against themselves; and the result has been what we too well know. Let us, therefore, congratulate ourselves, that we have great constitutional principles and laws, to which we can refer, and to which we are attached.

* * * * *

When journeymen find their wages reduced, they should take time to *reflect on the real cause* before they fly upon their employers, who are, in many cases, in as great, or greater, distress than themselves. How many of these employers have, of late, gone to jail for debt, and left helpless families behind them! The employer's trade falls off. His goods are reduced in price. His stock loses the half of its value. He owes money. He is ruined; and how can he continue to pay high wages? The cause of his ruin is the *weight of the taxes*, which presses so heavily on us all, that we lose the power of purchasing goods. But it is certain that a great many, a very large portion, of the farmers, tradesmen, and manufacturers, have, by their supineness and want of public spirit, contributed towards the bringing of this ruin upon themselves and upon you. They have *skulked* from their public duty. They have kept aloof from, or opposed, all measures for a redress of grievances; and, indeed, they still skulk, though ruin and destruction stare them in the face. . . . Instead of coming forward to apply for a reduction of those taxes which are pressing them as well as you to the earth, what are they doing?

Why, they are applying to the Government to add to their receipts by passing *Corn Bills;* by preventing *foreign wool* from being imported; and many other such silly schemes. Instead of asking for a reduction of taxes, they are asking for the *means of paying taxes!* Instead of asking for the abolition of sinecure places and pensions, they pray to be enabled to continue to pay the amount of those places and pensions! They know very well that the salaries of the judges and of many other persons were greatly raised, some years ago, on the ground of the rise in the price of labour and provisions; why, then, do they not ask to have those salaries *reduced* now that *labour* is reduced? Why do they not apply to the case of the judges and others, the arguments which they apply to you? They can talk boldly enough to you; but they are too great cowards to talk to the Government, even in the way of petition!

* * * * *

I have no room, nor have I any desire, to appeal to your passions upon this occasion. I have laid before you, with all the clearness I am master of, the causes of our misery, the measures which have led to those causes, and I have pointed out what appears to me to be the only remedy—namely, a reform of the Commons', or people's, House of Parliament. I exhort you to proceed in a peaceable and lawful manner; but, at the same time, to proceed with zeal and resolution in the attainment of this object. If the skulkers will not join you, if the 'decent fire-side' gentry still keep aloof, proceed by yourselves. Any man can draw up a petition, and any man can carry it up to London, with instructions to deliver it into trusty hands, to be presented whenever the House shall meet. Some further information as to

this matter in a future number. In the meanwhile, I remain, your friend, WM. COBBETT."

Such, then, was the clarion, which was to awaken the working-classes of England; to systematize their thoughts, and to give definiteness to their aims.

And such was, also, the stuff which was to terrify, for a little while longer, our dear old friends "Law and Order." While the hundreds of thousands were welcoming this new gospel, were learning a practicable path for their bewildered feet: the partisans of Government were absolutely dazed, blinded, with terror; and their horror at the growth of liberal opinions (otherwise, "the floodgates of sedition") completely disabled them from discussing domestic politics with any semblance of calmness. As for the mediocrities in power,—they had succeeded in keeping out the shifty Whigs; but here was a third party coming to the front, with claims as good as their own, and promising to acquire a force which they might withstand in vain. Ministers, in short, were alarmed; and they announced their resolve, in the words of Lord Liverpool, to pursue the "Stern path of Duty!" Lord Sidmouth (now Home Secretary), whose qualities for statesmanship no person, other than his royal patron, had been able to discover since he left the Speaker's chair in 1802,—was at his wits' end. And minor lights,

as Mr. Wilberforce, sighed and groaned over so much blasphemy as was rife, Cobbett's being "the most pernicious of all."

The course of the Stern Path, as regards the subject of these pages, must be described in another chapter. Meanwhile, the immediate consequences of the publication of the first cheap *Register* remain to be noted.

All sorts of means were taken to hinder the circulation of the now ubiquitous journal. Booksellers who sold the *Register* were threatened with loss of custom; publicans were threatened with the withdrawal of their licences; hawkers and pedlars were threatened with the police.

Cheap opposition pamphlets were started.[5] The newspapers, which had been pretty quiet concerning Mr. Cobbett's merits, ever since 1812, now began again:[6] the *New Times* coming out with a

[5] *E.g.*, "The Friend of the People," price threepence, "occasionally" (Chapple, Pall Mall). Of this there were five "occasions."

"Anti-Cobbett; or, The Weekly Patriotic Register" (from the *New Times*), which appeared about eight times.

"The Detector; an Occasional Paper" (Hatchard). We cannot "detect" the existence of more than four such papers.

These were all on similar lines: extracts from, and references to, the days of Porcupine, spiced with transparent falsehood.

[6] "We believe it is now some five or six years since the *Times* journal put down the work entitled *Cobbett's Weekly Register*, and sunk its author into obscurity and contempt. . . . . Since that time we had thought that his journal had wholly dropped to the ground, some other writers, such as those of the *Independent Whig* and *Examiner*, who were more virulent and impudent than himself, having sprung up. We learned, however, lately, that Cobbett's

specially grand affair, headed "COBBETT against COBBETT," which was subsequently issued as a broadside.

And a very serious charge did they bring against this "*convicted libeller*," this "*firebrand*," this "*brutal ruffian*," this "*convicted incendiary*," this "*hoary miscreant*," and his "*ferocious journal*."[7] In what, then, had he manifested this brutality,—this ferocity? By lacerating the naked back of another of his labourers? Running off with another man's wife? Setting fire to barns and ricks? Defrauding the stock-exchange?

None, none of these things. The criminal was proved, by overwhelming evidence,—"out of his own mouth" indeed—to have formerly denounced Reform!!! Sad fellow!

Register was still in existence, having crept on in obscurity for a series of years."—*Times*, Nov. 14, 1816.

[7] For the context, whence these choice epithets are extracted, *vide Quarterly Review*, 1816-17, *passim*.

CHAPTER XXII.

"BETWEEN SILENCE AND A DUNGEON LAY MY ONLY CHOICE."

WHEN your wife, or your nurse, or your mother-in-law, utters that reproach of hers, "Ah, I told you how it would be!"—the spirit within you is not apt to be tinged with a pervading gratefulness.

Similarly, "a man is not likely to be thanked who calls attention to the vast discrepancies between the theory and practice of the Constitution" (as one of our later philosophers remarks). What with the impertinence of the thing—the implied assertion of superiority—the further implication of failure and muddle on the part of the prescriptive interpreters of the Constitution: the counsel offered by outsiders is rejected with disdain, or put down to anything but disinterested motives.

The shortsightedness and illiberality of the Eldon and Sidmouth type of statesmanship was constantly displayed in this way. Let there be a

Reform petition offered to Parliament, and they would refuse to receive it, if, by any means, some technical objection could be raised. Given a civic state dinner, and the ministers would absent themselves if they disagreed with the Lord Mayor's politics. Let a Sunday paper advocate the correction of financial abuses, and the suspicion is at once raised that the grievance really lies in not having a share of the spoil. Genuine men like Whitbread and Romilly, Roebuck and Cobden, have not always escaped similar imputation, from which their known characters should yet have shielded them.

The ministers of the Regent might, however, have done better justice to themselves, and to their opportunities, but for their contemptible master. The difficulty of conciliating that man was immensely enhanced by his disreputable domestic circumstances, and the daily need of avoiding exposure, by keeping watch[1] upon the *Examiners* and the *Registers* of the day. Animadversions

[1] *Keeping watch*, in the times of which we are speaking, was not exclusively from the constable's point of view. The hand of intrigue was always prepared, in order to purchase silence, as it had been for a century past. When the Hunts were about to enter prison on account of their libel upon the Regent, they had the opportunity of refusing an immunity from punishment if they would consent to hold their tongues for the future. And an offer was sent to Cobbett to remit the 1000*l.* fine, just before his release in 1812, if he would promise not to support the cause of the Princess of Wales.

upon the conduct of the Irreclaimable are pretty generally wasted; and when the Irreclaimable is in sovereign power, discussion on his personal demerits is apt to be mixed up, somehow or other, with such meaner questions as the welfare of his subjects, and the stability of the Throne. At this stage, "I told you so" becomes sedition; and the next thought is of sabres, and bayonets, and dungeons.

So the Liverpool ministry had their hands full, between this selfish prince and starving people. Throughout the year 1816, there was a determined outcry for Parliamentary Reform and reduction of public expenditure. And being demanded as *rights*, the end of granting these things was looked upon as something too awful to contemplate.

One leading difficulty with the Reformers was as to the mode: Reformers of that day must be divided into classes and sub-classes, when their history comes to be written. There were avowed Republicans at one end of the scale, and advocates of a purified Constitution at the other. Their common opponents, however, not only refused to make distinction, but took hold of minor differences and threw them in the Reformers' teeth; thus discrediting the entire principle.

For example: Mr. Watson, surgeon, is found to have a number of prepared pike-heads in his house.

He is ready to employ force, if it comes to the point. Mr. William Cobbett, editor, takes the liberty of telling the nation that it will never be itself again without a reform. He abhors violence of any sort or kind. Yet both of these persons, along with all those of intermediate shades of opinion, are decried as subverters of the Constitution.

This trick had been kept up for twenty-five years past. And now that "the most powerful and effective public writer that ever appeared," the "closest political reasoner of his time" (as described by cotemporaries), was the leading writer and reasoner upon Reform in Parliament: the best thing to do was to impute unworthy and wicked motives, and to follow that up by an endeavour to curtail his liberty.

Accordingly, the principal London newspapers were full of COBBETT, from the middle of November, 1816, until the opening of Parliament; the *Courier*,[2] the *Times*, and the *Morning Post*, making it their special business to misrepresent him.[3]

[2] The *Courier* was generally suspected of being a subsidized paper. The *Edinburgh Review* characterized it thus:—"A paper of shifts and expedients, of base assertions and thoughtless impudence. It denies facts on the word of a minister, and dogmatizes by authority."

[3] One likes to hear both sides, when there is a trifling difference of opinion:—

"If Cobbett and Hunt were really honest men, and really wished well to the cause of Reform, they would abstain from

"Mr. Cobbett, whose sincerity in the cause of the country can no longer be questioned by any party," &c., &c.

And, as the popular ferment had reached a high point, nothing could be easier. Henry Hunt was holding forth to eager multitudes, whose conduct (partly by incitement of Government spies) led to measures being taken for preserving the peace. When the Regent went to open Parliament, a stone was thrown, which broke the window of his carriage. Then the Government tried a raid upon the Hampden Clubs, by hauling up their leading members before a Secret Committee. But, beyond a few scatter-brained individuals who really hoped there was going to be a revolution, there was nothing to fear. As the *Times* (Feb. 5th) said, "Of anything like plot or conspiracy, in the

meddling with it. . . . If a man wants to repair his mansion, and an adviser comes and tells him that he will do no good except he pull it altogether down and rebuild it, the owner immediately begins to think it better that he should continue to live in the old house as it is rather than run such risks."—*Times*, Jan. 28, 1817.

"He has increased his circulation to *forty* and *fifty thousand* per week; and thus his work tends to counteract the unprincipled sophistry of certain of the daily newspapers and of their satellites through the country. As Mr. C. gives no quarter to the partisans of war and corruption, and to the sinecurists and peculators who devour the substance of the people, and as he is the able advocate of the vital question of Parliamentary Reform, we conceive it to be our duty to recommend his *Register* to the favourable attention of our liberal and enlightened readers."—*Monthly Magazine*, January, 1817.

general and national sense of those words, no symptoms have yet appeared."

Yet, because people were clamouring for Reform and remission of public burdens, the Home Secretary and his friends were frightened out of their lives. And, because Mr. Cobbett was the leader and guider, upon these topics, he was charged with exciting the labourers and journeymen to "burnings, and plunderings, and devastations, and shedding of blood." The law officers of the Crown were forthwith instructed to examine the "blasphemous and seditious" pamphlets of the day; but, as Lord Sidmouth was "sorry to say," they were "unable to find out anything which they could prosecute with any chance of success!"

The Fears gained the day, however; and, to the dismay of the parliamentary opposition, headed by Earl Grey and Sir Samuel Romilly; and under a protest of the Lords, led by the Duke of Sussex, the ministry succeeded in passing a Bill for the Suspension of Habeas Corpus.

The astonishing success of the cheap edition of the *Register* caused a change in Cobbett's domestic arrangements. The woods and the fields had to be relinquished; and he came up to London, so as to be in the thick of the fight. Accordingly, we find Wm. Cobbett, jun., installed as publisher, at 8, Catherine Street, Strand. The *Register* is now

entered at Stationers' Hall, on account of the garbled editions that have been printed by others; yet the proprietor "gladly" gives permission to reprint his writings "in any regular newspaper." A cheap edition of "Paper against Gold" is being issued in weekly numbers; and preparations are made for a new serial, under the title of "The Parliamentary Register."

With all this writing, and printing and publishing, it must have been hot and exciting work in London. As the day for opening parliament approached, the houses of Burdett, and Cartwright, and Cobbett became the daily resort of Reformers. At this time, Burdett was getting cool over the great question, and the principal labours fell upon the hands of Mr. Cobbett and of Lord Cochrane; the latter, by the way, having charge of a monster petition. Besides this, there were two public appearances in Hampshire: one, on the occasion of a grand meeting upon Portsdown hill, and the other at Winchester. One evidence of the state of popular feeling upon the questions of Reform and of the threatened invasions of the liberty of the people, is shown in the presentation of six hundred petitions to the Commons on the 5th of March alone.

And well might the nation be alarmed. As soon as the preliminaries of the session had been completed, the ministry introduced their Habeas Corpus Suspension Bill, and passed also an Act for

preventing "seditious meetings and assemblies." The public voice was thus completely enthralled. And, amid all the hubbub, it was known that the leading object in view was to silence Mr. Cobbett.[4]

The Government might as well have taken up the broom of Mrs. Partington, in order to dispose of Mr. Cobbett. The only effect, upon him, was to provide new and beautiful topics for his readers :—

"I will first explain clearly what the Habeas Corpus Act is, &c."

"Suffer me to say a word or two about the Hawkers' and Pedlars' Act."

and so forth; with full exposition of all previous futile attempts upon the progress of liberty and intelligence. The papers in the *Register* of this period ought to have convinced Ministers of the error of their ways: of the utterly false position in which they had placed themselves. So clear in description; so cogent in their reasoning; so temperate. And withal, so full of the writer's own humour :—

". . . irreligious, immoral, or seditious TENDENCY. Only think of the extent of this word *tendency!* only think

[4] It appears from a memorandum, printed in Mr. Yonge's "Life and Administration of Lord Liverpool" (vol. ii. 298), that Robert Southey recommended, if he did not primarily suggest, these severities. He names "Cobbett, Hone, and the *Examiner*, &c.," as the writers who are to be stopped, and thinks that their imprisonment should be "such as will prevent them from carrying on their journals."

of the boundless extent of such a word, and of such a word being left to the interpretation of thousands of men! Suppose the editor of a newspaper to insert an article, which article recommended the reduction of the salt-tax: what does this *tend* to? Why, to be sure, a magistrate might think, to make the people discontented with the salt-tax; to make them discontented with the salt-tax would be, he might think, to make them discontented with those who compel the people to pay it; those who compel the people to pay it are Kings, Lords, and Commons; and, therefore, here is an article which *tends* to make the people discontented with Kings, Lords, and Commons, and which, of course, *tends* to produce hatred of them, and to bring about insurrection, treason, revolution, and blood and carnage!"

Clear, and temperate, and lively as they were, however, there was no mincing of matters; even to the pointing out to Lord Sidmouth, at last, that he was the real revolutionist,[5] and that all his efforts were "unavailing as to the work of stifling."

"NOTHING WILL, CAN, OR SHALL KEEP MY WRITINGS FROM THE EYES OF MY SUFFERING AND FAITHFUL COUNTRYMEN!"

But, if this was resolution and not mere swagger, how was it to be done? Any one of his neighbours, maliciously disposed, could have Mr. Cobbett brought before a magistrate, and thrown into

[5] "Not he who demands rights, but he who abjures them, is an anarchist."—*J. Horne Tooke.*

jail without warning, for any word with a tendency. What is more, they meant to do so.

There was only one way:—

"A few years ago, being at Barnet Fair, I saw a battle going on, arising out of some sudden quarrel, between a butcher and the servant of a West-country grazier. The butcher, though vastly superior in point of size, finding that he was getting the worst of it, recoiled a step or two, and drew out his knife. Upon the sight of this weapon, the grazier turned about and ran off, till he came up to a Scotchman who was guarding his herd, and out of whose hand the former snatched a good ash-stick, about four feet long. Having thus got what he called *a long arm*, he returned to the combat, and, in a very short time, he gave the butcher a blow upon the wrist, which brought his knife to the ground. The grazier then fell to work with his stick in such a style as I never before witnessed. The butcher fell down, and rolled and kicked; but he seemed only to change his position in order to insure to every part of his carcase a due share of the penalty of his baseness. After the grazier had, apparently, tired himself, he was coming away, when, happening to cast his eye upon the *knife*, he ran back and renewed the basting, exclaiming every now and then, as he caught his breath: '*Dra' thy knife, wo't?*' He came away a second time, and a second time returned, and set on upon the caitiff again; and this he repeated several times, exclaiming always when he recommenced the drubbing: 'Dra' thy knife, wo't?'—till, at last, the butcher was so bruised, that he was actually unable to stand or even to get up; and yet, such, amongst English-

men, is the abhorrence of foul fighting, that not a soul attempted to interfere, and nobody seemed to pity a man thus unmercifully beaten.

"It is my intention to imitate the conduct of this grazier; to resort to *a long arm*, and to combat Corruption, while I keep myself out of the reach of her *knife*. Nobody called the grazier a coward, because he did not stay to oppose his fists to a pointed and cutting instrument. My choice, as I said before (leaving all considerations of personal safety out of the question), lies between silence and retreat. If I remain *here*, all other means will be first used to reduce me to silence; and if all these means fail, then will come the dungeon. Therefore, that I may still be able to write, and to write with freedom too, I shall write, if I live, from AMERICA . . . ."

This resolve appears to have been in Mr. Cobbett's mind since the middle of February, shortly after the introduction of the Gagging Bills, as they were called. It was now the end of March, and the campaign against the popular press was in victorious advance. People could almost hear the prison doors creaking open. When, lo! the persecutors wake up one morning, and find that the wretch has flown!

Have you ever watched, reader, the gyrations of pussy's face—the involuntary muscular contortions of her jaws, at sight of a dickey-bird, when that gentle creature is on the wrong (but safe) side of a window-pane? Such was the aspect of Authority,

when she found that Mr. Cobbett had slipped through her fingers. And such, the impotent anger of his rivals.[6] The explosion of wrath, which took place upon the discovery that he was out of harm's way, really appears laughable, to look back upon it from this distance of time. He had eloped from his creditors, had been diddling the Stamp Office, had escaped imprisonment for life: he had deserted his family, deserted the cause, deserted his country: and, as for his pretended patriotism, what did his friends think of the brave Cobbett now? Even the Reformists, themselves, felt a shudder of dismay pass over them; whilst the *Examiner* class of scribblers fell upon the caitiff with their envious sneers, retailing the lies and imputations invented and cast about by their own enemies! But, perhaps the unkindest cut of all was on the part of the *Chronicle*, when that great bulwark of whiggism, and mock-Reformist, informed its readers that Cobbett had gone off to America because the circulation of the *Register* had fallen so low, through the operations of Sidmouth's acts.

The fact of the matter being that, in spite of all

[6] "As might be expected, falsehoods out of number, and in every garb, have been circulated in regard to a man who never compromised with his convictions."—*Monthly Magazine*, May, 1817.

There were many, it must be said, who looked at the matter in its proper light, and fairly pointed out that Cobbett had been driven away.

that could be said, Mr. Cobbett's flight to America in 1817, was one of the cleverest and most spirited acts of his life. The decision of character, the singleness of purpose, and confidence in his own resources, displayed on this occasion, are almost unexampled. Hundreds of writers had expatriated themselves, before now; but where was the man to be found, who had done so with a view to a better fighting-ground? Political refugees were swarming throughout the Union, but they were beginning life anew; and who amongst them but had cast the dust of their native country from off their shoes—who but this one proclaimed, "England is my country, and to England I shall return,"—and lived to return and see his work accomplished?

The world, then, was looking for its weekly oracle (or weekly trash, or weekly venom, according to the point of view), upon Saturday, the 5th of April, 1817. Rumours had been afloat for several days that Cobbett was in Liverpool, on his way to America; and, upon the world going, with its twopences, to Catherine Street, Strand, rumour developed into certainty. The intending purchaser of a *Register* received instead,—

"MR. COBBETT'S TAKING LEAVE OF HIS COUNTRYMEN."

As one more specimen of what Cobbett could say, when his heart was more than usually full of tender and earnest feeling, the reader will like to have presented here some portions :—

"My Beloved Countrymen,—Soon after this reaches your eyes, those of the writer will, possibly, have taken the last glimpse of the land that gave him birth, the land in which his parents lie buried, the land of which he has always been so proud; the land in which he leaves a people whom he shall, to his last breath, love and esteem beyond all the rest of mankind.

"Every one, if he can do it without wrong to another, has a right to pursue the path to his own happiness; as my happiness, however, has long been inseparable from the hope of assisting in restoring the rights and liberties of my country, nothing could have induced me to quit that country, while there remained the smallest chance of my being able, by remaining, to continue to aid her cause. No such chance is now left. The laws which have just been passed, especially if we take into view the real objects of those laws, forbid us to entertain the idea, that it would be possible to write on political subjects according to the dictates of truth and reason, without drawing down upon our heads certain and swift destruction. It was well observed by Mr. Brougham, in a late debate, that every writer who opposes the present measures, 'must now feel that he sits down to write with a halter about his neck,' an observation the justice of which must be obvious to all the world.

"Leaving, therefore, all considerations of personal interest, personal feeling, and personal safety; leaving even the peace of mind of a numerous and most affec-

tionate family wholly out of view, I have reasoned thus with myself: What is now left to be done? We have urged our claims with so much truth; we have established them so clearly on the ground of both law and reason, that there is no answer to us to be found other than that of a suspension of our personal safety. If I still write in support of those claims, I must be blind not to see that a dungeon is my doom. If I write at all, and do not write in support of those claims, I not only degrade myself, but I do a great injury to the rights of the nation by appearing to abandon them. If I remain here, I must, therefore, *cease to write*, either from compulsion, or from a sense of duty to my countrymen; therefore it is impossible to do any good to the cause of my country by remaining in it; but, if I remove to a country where I can write with perfect freedom, it is not only *possible*, but very *probable*, that I shall, sooner or later, be able to render that cause important and lasting services.

"Upon this conclusion it is, that I have made my determination; for, though life would be scarcely worth preserving, with the consciousness that I walked about my fields or slept in my bed merely at the mercy of a Secretary of State; though, under such circumstances, neither the song of the birds in spring, nor the well-strawed homestead in winter could make me forget that I and my rising family were slaves, still there is something so powerful in the thought of country and neighbourhood, and home and friends, there is something so strong in the numerous and united ties with which these and endless other objects fasten the mind to a long-inhabited spot, that to tear oneself away nearly approches to the separating the soul from the body. But then, on the other hand, I asked myself: 'What! shall I submit in silence?

Shall I be as dumb as one of my horses? Shall that indignation which burns within me be quenched? Shall I make no effort to preserve even the *chance* of assisting to better the lot of my unhappy country? Shall that mind, which has communicated its light and warmth to millions of other minds, now be extinguished for ever; and shall those who, with thousands of pens at their command, still saw the tide of opinion rolling more and more heavily against them, now be ever secure from that pen, by the efforts of which they feared being overwhelmed? Shall truth never again be uttered? Shall her voice never be heard, even from a distant shore?'

"Thus was the balance turned; and, my countrymen, be you well assured that, though I shall, if I live, be at a distance from you; though the ocean will roll between us, not all the barriers that nature as well as art can raise, shall be sufficient to prevent you from reading some part, at least, of what I write; and, notwithstanding all the wrongs of which I justly complain; notwithstanding all the indignation that I feel; notwithstanding all the provocations that I have received, or that I may receive, never shall there drop from my pen anything which, according to the law of the land, I might not safely write and publish in England. Those who have felt themselves supported by power, have practised towards me foul play without measure; but though I shall have the means of retaliation in my hands, never will I follow their base example.

"Though I quit my country, far be it from me to look upon her cause as desperate, and still farther be it from me to wish to infuse despondency into your minds. *I can serve that cause no longer by remaining here;* but the cause itself is so good, so just, so manifestly right and virtuous,

and it has been combated by means so unusual, so unnatural, and so violent, that it *must triumph* in the end. Besides, the circumstances of the country all tend to favour the cause of Reform. Not a tenth part of the evils of the system are yet in existence. The country gentlemen who have now been amongst our most decided adversaries, will very soon be compelled, for their own preservation, to become our friends and fellow-labourers. Not a fragment of their property will be left, if they do not speedily bestir themselves. They have been induced to believe that a Reform of the Parliament would expose them to plunder or degradation; but they will very soon find, that it will afford them the only chance of escaping both. The wonder is that they do not see this already, or rather that they have not seen it for years past. But they have been blinded by their foolish pride; that pride, which has nothing of mind belonging to it, and which, accompanied with a consciousness of a want of any natural superiority over the labouring classes, seeks to indulge itself in a species of vindictive exercise of power. There has come into the heads of these people, I cannot very well tell how, a notion that it is proper to consider the labouring classes as a distinct *caste.*

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"The writings of Malthus, who considers men as mere animals, may have had influence in the producing of this change; and we now frequently hear the working classes called *the population*, just as we call the animals upon a farm *the stock*. It is curious, too, that this contumely towards the great mass of the people should have grown into vogue amongst the country gentlemen and their families, at a time when they themselves are daily and

hourly losing the estates descended to them from their forefathers. They see themselves stripped of the means of keeping that hospitality, for which England was once so famed, and of which there remains nothing now but the *word* in the dictionary: they see themselves reduced to close up their windows, live in a corner of their houses, sneak away to London, crib their servants in their wages, and hardly able to keep up a little tawdry show; and it would seem, that for the contempt which they feel that their meanness must necessarily excite in the common people, they endeavour to avenge themselves, and at the same time to disguise their own humiliation, by their haughty and insolent deportment towards the latter: thus exhibiting that mixture of poverty and pride, which has ever been deemed better calculated than any other union of qualities to draw down upon the possessors the most unfriendly of human feelings.

"It is curious, also, that this fit of novel and ridiculous pride should have afflicted the minds of these persons at the very time that the working classes are become singularly enlightened. Not enlightened in the manner that the sons of Cant and Corruption would wish them to be. The conceited creatures in what is called high life, and who always judge of men by their clothes, imagine that the working classes of the people have their minds quite sufficiently occupied by the reading of what are called 'religious and moral tracts.' Simple, insipid dialogues and stories, calculated for the minds of children seven or eight years old, or for those of savages just beginning to be civilized. These conceited persons have no idea that the minds of the working classes ever presume to rise above their infantine level. . . . The working classes of the people understand well

what they read; they dive into all matters connected with politics; they have a relish not only for interesting statement, for argument, for discussion; but the powers of *eloquence* are by no means lost upon them. . . In the report of the Secret Committee of the House of Lords, it is observed that, since the people have betaken themselves to this reading and this discussing, 'their character seems to be wholly changed.' I believe it is indeed! For it is the natural effect of enlightening the mind to change the character. But is not this change for the better? If it be not, why have we heard so much about the efforts for instructing the children of the poor? . . . Has it been intended that these people, when taught to read, should read nothing but Hannah More's *Sinful Sally*, and Mrs. Trimmer's Dialogues? Faith! The working classes of the people have a relish for no such trash. They are not to be amused by a recital of the manifold blessings of a state of things, in which they have not half enough to eat, nor half enough to cover their nakedness by day, and to keep them from perishing by night. They are not to be amused by the pretty stories about 'the bounty of providence in making brambles for the purpose of tearing off pieces of the sheep's wool, in order that the little birds may come and get it to line their nests with to keep their young ones warm!' Stories like these are not sufficient to fill the minds of the working classes of the people. They want something more solid. They have had something more solid. Their minds, like a sheet of paper, have received the lasting impressions of undeniable fact and unanswerable argument; and it will always be a source of the greatest satisfaction to me to reflect that I have been mainly instrumental in giving those impressions, which I am

very certain will never be effaced from the minds of the people of this country.

* * * * * *

"I shall be as careful as I have been, not to write anything that even a special jury would pronounce to be a *Libel*. I have no desire to write libels. I have written none here. Lord Sidmouth was 'sorry to say' that I had not written anything that the law officers could prosecute with any chance of success. I do not remove for the purpose of writing libels, but for the purpose of being able to write what is *not* libellous. I do not retire from a combat with the Attorney-General, but from a combat with a dungeon, deprived of pen, ink, and paper. A combat with the Attorney-General is quite unequal enough. That, however, I would have encountered. I know too well what a trial by Special Jury is. Yet that, or any sort of *trial*, I would have stayed to face. So that I could have been sure of a trial, of whatever sort, I would have run the risk. But, against the absolute power of imprisonment, without even a hearing, for time unlimited, in any jail in the kingdom, without the use of pen, ink, and paper, and without any communication with any soul but the keepers; against such a power it would have been worse than madness to attempt to strive. Indeed, there could be no striving, in such a case; where I should have been as much at the disposal of the Secretary of State as are the shoes which he has upon his feet. No! I will go, where I shall not be as the shoes upon Lord Sidmouth's and Lord Castlereagh's feet. I will go where I can make sure of the use of pen, ink, and paper; and these two lords may be equally sure that, in spite of everything they can do, unless they openly enact or proclaim a censorship on the press, or cut off all

commercial connexion with America, you, my good and faithful countrymen, shall be able to read what I write.

* * * * * *

"And now, my countrymen, before I set off, let me caution you against giving the smallest credit to anything that Corruption's Press may assert of me. You have seen what atrocious falsehoods it has put forth in my presence; what, then, will it not do in my absence? I have written thousands of letters to various persons in all parts of the kingdom. I give any one leave to make public any letter of mine, accompanied by the certificate of any respectable friend of mine, that it is in my handwriting. I challenge all those, whom I ever conversed with, to say, that I ever uttered a wish to see overthrown any one of the Constitutional establishments of the kingdom; and, I most solemnly declare that I never associated with any man who professed, even in private, to entertain any such wish; but, on the contrary, all those with whom I have ever been intimate in politics, have always had in view the preservation of all the establishments and orders of the kingdom, as one of the objects of a timely reform of the Parliament.

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"A mutual affection, a powerful impulse, equal to that out of which this wonderful sagacity arises, will, I hope, always exist between me and my hard-used countrymen; an affection which my heart assures me, no time, no distance, no new connexions, no new association of ideas however enchanting, can ever destroy, or in any degree enfeeble or impair. . . . Never will I own as my friend him who is not a friend of the people of England. I will never become a Subject or a Citizen in any other State, and will always be a foreigner in every coun-

try but England. Any foible that may belong to your character, I shall always willingly allow to belong to my own. All the celebrity which my writings have obtained, and which they will preserve long and long after Lords Liverpool, and Sidmouth, and Castlereagh are rotten and forgotten, I owe less to my own talents than to that discernment, and that noble spirit in you, which have at once instructed my mind and warmed my heart: and, my beloved countrymen, be you well assured that the last beatings of that heart will be, love for the people, for the happiness, and the renown of England; and hatred of their corrupt, hypocritical, dastardly, and merciless foes."

A postscript adds that the weekly political pamphlet would be revived in about three months' time. And his readers are assured further that—

"If I have life for only a year or two at farthest, I shall be back with them again. The beautiful country through which I have so lately travelled, bearing, upon every inch of it, such striking marks of the industry and skill of the people, never can be destined to be inhabited by slaves. To suppose such a thing possible would be at once to libel the nation and to blaspheme against Providence. Let my readers not fear my finding out the means of communicating to them whatever I write. They will see the political pamphlet revive and be continued, until the day when they will find me again dating my addresses to them from London or from Botley.

"WM. COBBETT.

"*Liverpool, 28th March*, 1817."

The suspension of the *Register* lasted for about three months. On the 12th of July it was resumed, with a letter dated from Cobbett's residence, May 8th, and the journal was kept up without further interruption. Only on one or two occasions did a number appear in which there was not a communication from the exiled editor.

But his place in the journalistic world was not left utterly vacant. William Hone led the way, with his *Reformists' Register*, among a series of similar publications. Indeed, it was understood that Hone's Register occupied the position which Mr. Cobbett had temporarily abdicated. Hone had been a staunch supporter, since the *Political Register* had become popularized; besides making

7 "Hone's Reformist's Register," "Sherwin's Political Register," "The Republican," edited by Carlile; "The Black Dwarf" of T. J. Wooler; "The Yellow Dwarf," &c. "The Black Dwarf" was a somewhat remarkable fellow. He dealt fiercely with the prevailing political hypocrisies and abuses in Church and State. Wooler was very angry over Cobbett's flight to America, but soon condoned the matter. "The Yellow Dwarf" had some severe articles upon the spy system, and the libel laws, and the unfortunate State prisoners. William Hazlitt appears among the contributors.

"Shadgett's Weekly Review" was an opposition affair, started with the object of trying to put down these irrepressibles. Some sketches from this journal were collected and republished under the title of "The Political Quixote; or, The Adventures of the Renowned Don Blackibo Dwarfino and his Trusty Squire, Seditiono; a Romance, in which are introduced many Popular and Celebrated Political Characters of the Present Day" (London, 1820). One of the "characters" is Pietro Porcupino.

The *Ulster Register* printed at Belfast ("for the proprietor, John Lawless, Esq."), was a partial reprint of Cobbett's.

a depôt for that journal at his little shop in the Old Bailey, he had recently reproduced the American autobiography of Peter Porcupine in a cheap form.[8]

In the course of the summer of this year, an exposure of the spy system was made in the House of Commons; and it was proved, over and over again, that nearly all the serious riots had been instigated by these wretches, actually in the employ of Government. The result was a public condemnation of the infamous system, and its immediate disuse on the part of ministers. And, as a matter of course, all the signs of turbulence in the country ceased; the Habeas Corpus Suspension Act being repealed soon after the next meeting of Parliament. In fact, every day proved, more and more clearly, that it was nothing but fear which had magnified a few local discontents—by means of that powerful lens, Anti-Reform—into designs upon the fabric of the Constitution.

But the mischief done to the temper of the people was irreparable. Those persons (of whom there must be some proportion, even among such a phlegmatic race as the English) whose reforming zeal was easily raised to fever heat, got into

[8] With his incurable propensity for parody, Hone closed up this pamphlet thus:—"Now the rest of the acts and life of this author, are they not written in the volumes of his *Political Register* and other works?"

trouble; and several suffered the capital penalty for treason, during the years 1817-19. Their imprudence, however, could not delay, for long, the imminent Reform; the violence done to popular feeling, by a combination of cruelty and weakness, was bearing its fruit; and this is how, in spite of its natural claims upon the patriotism of Englishmen, Toryism came to bear undeserved opprobrium. We, who are of no party but that of Progress and Enlightenment, and who have long ceased to believe in traditional politics, whether Whig or Tory, will not fail to take to heart again the lesson: that violence, impatience, and selfish prescription are as much out of place in the political as in the moral world. We have had ample opportunities of noting this, during the last half-century; and if there is anything upon which we may congratulate ourselves, it is that we have had Melbournes and Peels, Russells and Palmerstons, during a period of European revolution, instead of such men as the favourites of George the Third.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"WHATEVER OTHER FAULTS I MAY HAVE, THAT OF LETTING GO MY HOLD IS NOT ONE."

AMONG the topics which, of recent years, had been current matter for discussion, our relations with the United States were not the least important. The dispute, arising from repeated violations of neutrality on the part of England, which ultimately led to the war of 1812, was the fruit of purely administrative errors; and had nothing to do with the popular sentiment of this country. The two nations had become reconciled, for fifteen years past; and, had it not been for the arbitrary assumptions put forth by the British Government, on the basis of our alleged naval supremacy, every aspect gave promise of close international friendship.

It may be said, however, that the contest had its beneficial side. The peace, which ensued, has never since been broken: quite as much, perhaps, because conciliation has since become the ruling

idea in English foreign politics, as on account of any fanciful beliefs in the abstract inutility of war. The last lingering traditions, as to the possibility of the Yankees being coerced, were banished from the minds of English statesmen by the events of this naval war; and, such point gained, the fogs of many minor prejudices naturally disappeared.

Of those persons who, with pen in hand, aided in the solution of the questions in dispute with, and in the enlightenment of the people concerning, the United States of America, there is none whose services can be compared with those of the subject of these pages. Whilst the London press was encouraging the Government, besides misleading the people as to the real nature and prospects of the conflict, Mr. Cobbett was declaring, as he had been declaring from the first: that the points in dispute would have to be given up, or the war would last for years. Mr. Cobbett's patriotism, and Mr. Cobbett's decency were, as usual, called in question; but the "points" were unreservedly relinquished, and Mr. Cobbett was right, once more.

So, it came to pass that another reconciliation ensued besides that between the two peoples. The Republicans of New York and Philadelphia discovered that Peter Porcupine was not such a vile wretch after all. They read his *Register*, and re-

printed portions of it.[1] They sent him newspapers. And one effusive committee, of Albany, New York, sent him a suit of clothes ("made of cloth manufactured in this State, from wool grown within it.")[2]

There followed, of course, effusiveness on the

[1] *Niles's Register*, published at Baltimore, a weekly journal of extended influence, had begun by abusing Cobbett, but speedily found it was better worth while to reprint his writings concerning America. Some of the independent republications were,—

"Porcupine Revived; or, An Old Thing Made New. Being (1) An Argument against the Expediency of a War with England; (2) An Exposition of the Absurdity of sending Albert Gallatin to treat with the British. By William Cobbett, Esq." (New York, 1813.) The editor is a Federalist, and thinks it surprising that Cobbett should have described so accurately seventeen years ago the *present* condition of the States.

"Letters on the Late War between the United States and Great Britain, &c., &c., by William Cobbett, Esq." (New York, 1815). The preface is highly eulogistic, and forgives all Cobbett's former wickedness.

"The Pride of Britannia Humbled; or, The Queen of the Ocean Unqueen'd by the American Cock-boats, &c., &c. Illustrated and demonstrated by four Letters to Lord Liverpool, by William Cobbett, Esq." (Philadelphia, 1815). This editor is also very magnanimous.

It was a marked characteristic of the estimates formed by Cobbett's cotemporaries that the party, or the set, which he for the time being appeared to support, readily overlooked his former opinions and so-called "inconsistencies." This applies to London, as well as to Philadelphia. Never was a man so readily forgiven. Envy alone was his enduring enemy, as it always is to great abilities and to superior personal character.

[2] We get a glimpse of home over this incident:—"The youngest asked where Albany was. He ran to the map. And then the little pamphlet from Boston; they looked into it; they saw the same thing which they had, one or the other of them, written at my dictation only a few months before. Who would barter such pleasures for all the wealth and all the titles in the world?"

part of Mr. Cobbett. Theirs was a free country, where the truth might be spoken and written, without fear of an Attorney-general; there were still many political evils rampant there, but the mass of the people were enlightened; they would produce their own wool, in spite of the Yorkshire clothiers; they would soon have a fleet, have manufactures, take the lead in agriculture, and set an example to the world of civil and religious liberty. And, he expressed his great pleasure, nay pride, that his weekly essays were thought worthy of being moulded into pamphlets and books, for the use of the free American nation.

All this led, at last, to closer intercourse, and, upon repeated difficulties occurring with the Post Office, Mr. Cobbett resolved to attempt an American edition of the *Political Register*, with the two-fold object of cementing these pleasant relations, and of allowing a little more freedom in the handling of certain delicate matters. Accordingly, an office was opened in New York, early in 1816, (under the care of one Oldfield, and a nephew, Henry Cobbett), for the purposes of this republication. This was not, however, an affair of long continuance; its failure being partly due to post-office vigilance, by means of which a good deal of the MS. despatched to America found its way into the office of Lord Castlereagh.

It will be understood, then, that there were

plenty of inducements for a short visit to the United States. And, upon landing at New York, early in May, 1817, Mr. Cobbett found that he had rightly judged the temper of the Americans; for he was immediately surrounded with new friends; while old ones from Pennsylvania turned up from time to time.

His first step, the day after his arrival, was to cross into Long Island and look about for a farm: an object of no very great difficulty. The next was to begin writing to his "beloved countrymen." And the next may be guessed from the fact, that, on the day that his countrymen once more read the *Register* in the middle of July, a crop of peas was gathered which he had himself sown.

The farm in Long Island soon became the house of call for emigrants from England. Farmers who had "escaped from the tax-gatherer," and had brought out the remnant of their fortunes; journeymen and labourers, "escaping from tyranny;" countrymen, fleeing from ruin and starvation—even tradesmen, in despair, were flocking over; besides numbers of people who, from their previous training or occupations, were unfit for emigration. And the people of England, in consequence, knew more about life in America than they ever knew before.[3]

[3] That cruel urgency, *want of space*, forbids the insertion here of many a smart illustrative extract from Cobbett's American writings. The following must suffice, being parts of a letter "to the people of Botley," dated 10th November, 1818:—

Intermingled with the usual comments and warnings on current politics, Mr. Cobbett gave his

"My old Neighbours,—Great as the distance between you and me is, I very often think of you, and especially when I buy *salt*, which our neighbour Warner used to sell us for 19*s.* a bushel, and which I buy here for 2*s.* 6*d.* This salt is made, you know, down somewhere by Hamble. This very salt, when brought here from England, has all the charges of freight, insurance, wharfage, steerage to pay. It pays, besides, one third of its value in duty to the American Government before it be landed here. Then, you will observe, there is the profit of the American salt merchant; and then that of the shopkeeper who sells me the salt. And, after all this, I buy that very Hampshire salt for 2*s.* 6*d.* a bushel, English measure. What a Government, then, must that of the boroughmongers be! The salt is a gift of God. It is thrown on the shore. And yet these tyrants will not suffer us to use it until we have paid them 15*s.* a bushel for liberty to use it. . . . .

"You are compelled to pay the boroughmongers a heavy tax on your *candles* and *soap*. You dare not *make* candles and soap, though you have the fat and the ashes in abundance. If you attempt to do this, you are taken up and imprisoned; and if you resist, soldiers are brought to shoot you. This is *freedom*, is it? Now we, here, make our own candles and soap. Farmers sometimes *sell* soap and candles, but they never *buy* any. A labouring man, or a mechanic, buys a sheep now and then. Three or four days' work will buy a labourer a sheep to weigh sixty pounds, with seven or eight pounds of loose fat. The meat keeps very well, in winter, for a long time. The wool makes stockings, and the loose fat is made into candles and soap. The year before I left Hampshire, a poor woman at Holly Hill had dipped some rushes in grease to use instead of candles. An exciseman found it out, went and ransacked her house, and told her that, if the rushes had had *another dip*, they would have been *candles*, and she must have gone to gaol! Why, my friends, if such a thing were told here, nobody would believe it. . . . .

"I have had living with me an English labourer. He smokes tobacco, and he tells me that he can buy as much tobacco here for three cents, that is about three English half-pence, as he could buy in England for three shillings. The leather has no tax on it here; so that, though the shoemaker is paid a high price for his labour, the

readers minute and graphic details of his mode of life, and of the happiness and comfort around him: with no taxes, tithes, nor game-laws; no excisemen, spies, nor packed juries; no Castlereaghs, Eldons, Ellenboroughs, nor Sidmouths; labourers with plenty to eat and drink;—a fine climate, good neighbours, and a wide-spreading scene of general comfort and well-being; for everybody who came out resolved to work with honesty and spirit.

Of course, all these glowing accounts would sometimes bring out the wrong sort of men. Not only the lazy, who had estimated the prospects of emigration without including the important factor of hard work: but agents, and land-jobbers, and superficial gallopers through the country; many of

labouring man gets his shoes very cheap. In short, there is no excise here, no property tax, no assessed taxes. We have no such men as Chiddel and Billy Tovey to come and take our money from us; no window-peepers; no spies to keep a look out as to our carriages, and horses, and dogs. . . . We may wear hair-powder if we like, without paying for it, and a boy in our houses may whet our knives without our paying 2*l.* a year for it."

"I have talked to several farmers here about the tithes in England, and *they laugh*. They sometimes almost make me angry, for they seem, at last, not to believe what I say when I tell them that the English farmer gives, and is compelled to give, the parson a tenth part of his whole crop, and of his fruit, and milk, and eggs, and calves, and lambs, and pigs, and wool, and honey. They cannot believe this. They treat it as a sort of *romance*. . . . .

"To another of my neighbours . . . . I was telling the story about the poor woman at Holly Hill, who had nearly dipped her rushes once too often. He is a very grave and religious man. He looked very seriously at me, and said that falsehood was falsehood, whether in jest or earnest."

these were induced to come, and went home again to tell of their disgust, at not finding the riches of the country flow into their open mouths.[4]

Upon the whole, Mr. Cobbett must be considered to have greatly benefited his fellow-countrymen by his short settlement in Long Island; not only by truthful and painstaking accounts of the modes of life, and the resources of the country, but by his oft-repeated inculcation of industry, perseverance, and the moral virtues. But this is not all. This period saw the commencement of what is, in some

[4] There was a good deal of controversy concerning land-jobbing in America about this time. Mr. Morris Birkbeck, a prosperous farmer at Wanborough, in Surrey, left England with some highly coloured notions in his mind concerning the western territories of the United States, and produced two separate accounts, with the object of inducing British emigrants to follow him ("Notes on a Journey in America, from the Coast of Virginia to the Territory of Illinois," and "Letters from Illinois"). Cobbett gave him a letter or two, under the impression that Birkbeck's expectations were too fascinating. Mr. Birkbeck was unfortunately soon afterwards drowned in crossing a river. Mr. Henry Bradshaw Fearon, surgeon, went out under the auspices of some emigration committee. His was a somewhat "evil report," and amongst other matters recorded a visit to Cobbett's house in Long Island, which, he said, was mouldering to decay, that the fences were in ruins, and that the scene produced thoughts of melancholy ("Sketches of America: a Narrative of a Journey of 5000 Miles through the Eastern and Western States of America; with Remarks on Mr. Birkbeck's 'Notes' and 'Letters'"). The same candid pen which had endeavoured to check Birkbeck's too great enthusiasm now had the duty to perform of chastising the author of these misrepresentations, and of Fearon's general bad account of the Americans. Mr. Benjamin Flower also travelled westward, and sent home "Letters from the Illinois" (London, 1822). See, besides these, Faux's "Memorable days in merica" (London 1823).

respects, the most useful part of Mr. Cobbett's career; that part, namely, during which he served the cause of sound popular education.

His purpose, to this end, is first announced in a letter to Mr. Benbow, one of the recently imprisoned printers under the "Gagging" Act:—

"I now proceed to develope my plan for assisting in the acquirement of book-learning all those against whom the Boroughmongers have, in a great degree, closed the door to such learning, and whom they have the insolence to denominate the 'Lower Orders.' To effect this object it is my intention to publish, at a very cheap rate (though the word *cheap* may shake the nerves of Sidmouth and Canning to jelly)—at a very cheap rate it is my intention to publish—First, 'An English Grammar for the use of apprentices, plough-boys, soldiers, and sailors.' Second, 'A History of the Laws and Constitution of England,' for the use of the same description of persons. Third, 'A History of the Church and of Religion in England, in which will be seen the origin of the present *claims* of the clergy, and in which their *duties* will also be shown,' for the use of the same description of persons. Fourth, 'A view of the present state of the Income, Debt, and Expenses of the Kingdom; its Population and Paupers; its causes of Embarrassment and Misery, and the means of Restoration to ease and happiness,' for the use of the same description of persons."

The plan was not carried out in its entirety; although much of the material was furnished, in one form or other, in the pages of the *Register*

during the ensuing years of its course. The idea, at any rate, was pursued in the numerous essays on history and political economy presented to his readers from time to time. As for the Grammar, that was put in hand at once, and was published in London in December, 1818.

The success of the "English Grammar" was what might have been expected. Ten thousand copies were sold in a few weeks; a third edition being called for before the end of February. And it holds its own to this day—not as a class-book, for which it is unfit from its verbosity and its odd mixture of politics and humour; but for the purpose of self-education, for which it is of unrivalled value.

The Grammar had been preceded, in London, by "A Year's Residence in America," which purported to give current information as to the condition and prospects of the country, besides a journal of his own proceedings. Mr. Cobbett's hands were, therefore, full of work as ever; and his mind full as ever of thoughts concerning his own country. He tells Major Cartwright (who had written to inform Cobbett that he might safely return home) that he has begun several works, which, if he does not finish them now, he is sure he never shall. A little later, he writes to Henry Hunt, that he shall move the moment he thinks that he can do more good that way than by re-

maining; feeling quite certain as to the final issue of the great cause.

And he tells his readers that he has, in no sense, abandoned England: that the farther he is distant from England the stronger he always finds his attachment toward her. A year's absence had cooled his resentment; while it had, if possible, added to his feelings of affection toward his countrymen. "All the good that he had left behind was constantly in his thoughts, while the bad gradually became less and less frequently thought of."

Not that, however, the warfare upon Corruption was to cease. He was there "to uphold the honour of England," and to "aim deadly blows against her tyrants." And no better proof of the need of his lash could be found, than is furnished by the continued attacks upon his character.

But he had the ear of millions of people, who were suffering, more or less undeservedly, from the tyranny and misgovernment of irresponsible persons; and what was it, that the supporters of the Irresponsible classes continued their falsehoods and malignity? So the *Register* pursued its wonderful course, "skimming over the face of the Atlantic like the dove, of the innocence of which it partook;" and still finding its way into thousands of English cottage homes.

The governing principle of Mr. Cobbett's political

leanings was, still, his hatred of a paper-currency. And, in the year 1819, upon hearing that Parliament was preparing to authorize an early resumption of cash payment on the part of the Bank of England, he foresaw the inevitable panic and distress which must further ensue, before the country could again tread the path of prosperity. Hence, he thought, the opportunity for the Parliamentary Reformers: the certainty that the cause would be nearer of attainment; and he at once prepared for his return home. There was little to keep him in Long Island, separated from the bulk of his family: a farm was easily disposed of; and an accidental fire upon the premises—which caused him to seek shelter in a tent, "the walls of which were made of *Morning Chronicles* and *Couriers*, pasted upon laths that were a foot asunder,"—only gave occasion for expediting his departure.

There was, however, another "duty" (as he deemed it) to perform before leaving the soil of America. That self-imposed task was one of the most difficult, one of the most delicate, to which a man might lend himself: the attempt to do honour to a name which the world had chosen to scorn. The severest test, which Mr. Cobbett had ever yet applied to public opinion, was now to be outdone; for the name in question was that of THOMAS PAINE.[5]

[5] Mr. Paine has been variously described as a traitor, an apostate,

Chalmers's life of Paine, written in 1792, had merits of its own, which suited the violent and

a seducer, an infidel, a rogue, an outcast, and—"one of the most enlightened and benevolent men that ever lived." The reconciling of these things must be left to his biographer; meanwhile, the following facts are all that are necessary to be at present noted:—Paine had been an exciseman, and discovered that he could write by the production of an eloquent pamphlet upon some grievance of the excise-officers. He had written poems, and enjoyed the friendship of Oliver Goldsmith. Being introduced to Dr. Franklin, he was induced to visit Philadelphia; and there he wrote a pamphlet under the title of "Common Sense," which is generally asserted to have been a leading factor in producing the Declaration of Independence, being read and reprinted by hundreds of thousands. Honours came upon him; he was made Secretary to Congress for Foreign Affairs, and remained in America some dozen years. At the outbreak of the French Revolution, Paine was in London again, enjoying the friendship of Edmund Burke, whom, from the part the latter took concerning the American Revolution, Paine "naturally considered a friend to mankind." Mr. Burke's celebrated "Reflections on the Revolution in France" was, however, the means of sundering this friendship; and the tract was answered by Paine in "The Rights of Man," a pamphlet which produced even more delight among the advanced liberals of the day than Burke's had with the terrified aristocracy. The "answer" to Paine was his "Life," "by Francis Oldys, A.M." (one of the most horrible collections of abuse which even that venal day produced), written by George Chalmers, a Government clerk and pamphleteer, who, by the way, did much better work as an antiquarian and historical compiler. A second part of "The Rights of Man" followed this, and a Government prosecution succeeded that. A verdict of guilty, however, found the culprit a Member of the French National Convention; for no less than four constituencies had elected him, on his reputation alone. He sat for Calais; was near losing his head, for his vote on the side of humanity, when Louis XVI. was arraigned; wrote "The Age of Reason" in prison; eventually returned to America, and died (1809) in his seventy-third year, at his farm at New Rochelle, Long Island; which farm had been the gift of the nation about a quarter of a century previously.

depraved taste of the times. It speedily ran through many editions; and no one contributed more to its circulation than Peter Porcupine, who reprinted it in his *Censor* of September, 1796, "interspersed with remarks and reflections." But a neophyte writer, ardent in cotemporary loyalism, reading and greedily sucking-in the venomous plausibilities of Chalmers, is one thing: the same person coming to read, in his days of maturity, Paine's eloquent pleadings against oppression and misrule, is another; especially if maturity of strength and wisdom has brought with it a full admission of old weaknesses: renunciation of ignorance and folly. So Mr. Cobbett found that Thomas Paine was not such a blackguard: not so deserving of the abuse which he had helped to pour upon him; and proceeded, accordingly, to make reparation, by extolling Paine's merits as a writer (whilst, however, condemning his theology), and recommending the writings to his friends, whenever opportunity served. That which had led him to study Paine for himself was "The Decline and Fall of the English System of Finance," a pamphlet in which Paine had distinctly foretold the bursting of the paper-money bubble; and the reader will understand Cobbett's great enthusiasm, upon the discovery that Paine's elucidations furnished him with a key to what he considered the leading peril of the nation.

All this, however, might have casually passed into the catalogue of Mr. Cobbett's "inconsistencies,' without attracting special notice, but for the following circumstances :—

Paine had wished to be buried in the Quaker burial-ground of New York; but the request was denied—the principal alleged reason being that many persons had already accused the sect of Deism, and that, if they allowed this interment, the accusation would have a circumstance to rest upon. Mr. Paine was, therefore, buried in the corner of one of his own fields.

In September or October, 1819, the land having been previously sold, with a reservation of that particular spot, the person, whose business it was to take care of that little corner, was so sensible of the risk of disturbance to Paine's ashes that he commenced a negotiation for the purpose of having them transferred to a New York churchyard. The utmost that could be obtained was "leave to put them in the ground in a refuse place, where strangers and soldiers and other friendless persons were usually buried."

Under these circumstances, Mr. Cobbett (whose farm lay only a few miles off from New Rochelle) resolved that Paine's bones should "really have honourable burial!"

"Paine lies in a little hole under the grass and weeds of an obscure farm in America. There, however, he shall

not lie, unnoticed, much longer. He belongs to England. His fame is the property of England; and if no other people will show that they value that fame, the people of England will. Yes, amongst the pleasures that I promise myself, is that of seeing the name of Paine honoured in every part of England; where base corruption caused him, while alive, to be burnt in effigy."

Now this, be it observed in passing, was quite in accord with Cobbett's habitual notions as to the reverent treatment of the dead; as any industrious reader of him well knows.[6]

He now proceeded to keep the subject alive by frequent references; and, at last, announced that the coffin had been taken up, and would be sent off to England in the same condition as it was found.

"We will honour his name," he says, "his remains and his memory, in all sorts of ways. While the dead Boroughmongers, and the base slaves who have been their tools, moulder away under unnoticed masses of marble and brass, the tomb of this 'Noble of Nature' will be an object of pilgrimage with the people. . . . Let this be considered the act of the Reformers of England, Scotland, and Ireland. In their name we opened the grave,

[6] As, for example, under the head "Peterborough," in the "Geographical Dictionary," where Cobbett enters into a lament that to "the infamy" of Henry VIII., "and the shame of after-ages, there is no monument to record" the virtues and sufferings of Catherine of Arragon, who lies beneath the floor of the Cathedral; that the remains of Mary Queen of Scots had been taken thence to Westminster Abbey, while those of the *virtuous* queen were suffered to remain unhonoured, &c.

and in their name will the tomb be raised. We do not look upon ourselves as adopting *all* Paine's opinions upon all subjects. He was a great man, an Englishman, a friend of freedom, and the first and greatest enemy of the Borough and Paper System. This is enough for us."

So, with this unusual piece of luggage in his possession, Mr. Cobbett returned to England, reaching Liverpool at the end of November, 1819, in company with his son William.

The conspiracy panic had well-nigh died away. But, in August, 1819, the memorable occurrence, known as the Manchester massacre, was the means of reanimating the fears of ministers, through the spirit of indignation which it had roused throughout the land. Parliament was called together in November, for the purpose of fresh repressive legislation; the product of which was the celebrated series, known as the *Six Acts*.[7]

It was at this juncture that Mr. Cobbett met his friends again at Liverpool: to the dismay of some,

[7] To Prevent the Training of Persons to the Use of Arms.

For the more effectual Prevention and Punishment of Blasphemous and Seditious Libels.

To Authorize the Seizure and Detention of Arms on the part of Justices of the Peace.

To Subject certain Publications to the Newspaper-Stamp Duty.

For more effectually Preventing Seditious Meetings and Assemblies.

To Prevent Delay in the Administration of Justice in Cases of Misdemeanour.

who told him that he was "jumping into the lion's mouth:" to the joy of the great body of Reformers, who hastened to testify their gratification by every means in their power. From the towns of Yorkshire and Lancashire, especially, the Reformers crowded forward with addresses of welcome: in spite of the revived opposition of authority—opposition which was displayed in an unusual manner; as, when a poor fellow was put into jail, for going round the town of Bolton with the crier's bell, in order to announce Mr. Cobbett's safe return. Into jail, for ten weeks![8]

[8] "Authority" must have been in a terrible fright, if we may judge from the following (from the *Statesman* [London] newspaper, Dec. 2, 1819):—

"Manchester, Nov. 29.—Expected arrival of Mr. Cobbett.—Though the morning was very rainy, the expectation of Mr. Cobbett's arrival in this town attracted great numbers of persons from different parts of the country. The local authorities were on the alert, and military arrangements were made, which were as formidable as those of the 16th of August. Several pieces of cannon were brought into the town last night, but the yeomanry cavalry had received no orders, nor did they make their appearance to-day. Hussars were stationed on different parts of the Liverpool road, in order to give immediate information of Mr. C.'s movements."

The Borough reeves and constables placarded the town, recommending the people to keep within doors, and also addressed Mr. Cobbett, informing him that if he made a public entry into Manchester, it would be their "indispensable duty immediately to interfere."

The Reformers met this with a counter-placard:—"No procession.—In consequence of a placard posted this morning (joined with military arrangements, similar to those which preceded the fatal 16th of August last), ... the *real friends* of peace (the principal Reformers of Manchester) request the public not to give the fiends of

There was no need for violence on either side. As for Mr. Cobbett, he was constantly urging that "our cause" was "too good for any violence:" that he would have nothing to do with Reformers who called themselves Republicans. His first essays, after his return, are models of temperateness and wisdom: advice to the prime minister upon the condition of the country, and advice to the Reformers on sobriety and frugality: writings which would have raised a new man to immediate fame and fortune. But, they came from an old offender, whose unasked advice had too long been a terror. Violence, on the part of Mr. Cobbett's opponents, did not cease—and he had, unfortunately, by his own imprudence, placed the means of violence in their hands. In the first place, the incident of Paine's bones, coming at the time it did, was enough to damn any man's reputation for discretion as to the fitness of things—nothing could have been more inopportune. In America, it was true, people were beginning to understand Paine, and republish his works. But in England, he was known only by his theology; and was branded as an Atheist, by the hirelings who could not, or dare not try to, refute him. No name on earth was buried beneath such a weight of obloquy. So, nothing could be easier, nothing so effective, as to

St. Peter's another opportunity of shedding innocent blood, but to stay at home, and thus disappoint them of their prey."

couple the two names. And any fool who chose to call Mr. Cobbett an atheist, upon the word of some "constitutional" pamphleteer, could do so. As for the unfortunate bones, there never was such a joke! An ephemeral literature actually sprung up, on the topic[9]—whilst, from the custom house officers at Liverpool, startled at the unexpected importation,—to the man who now has them in his possession: from the man who recorded the arrival of the "bone-grubber," to our very latest historical sketcher: the affair has been a laughing-stock.

And it cannot be said that this derision is altogether unmerited. Mr. Cobbett ought to have known his countrymen well enough, to remember that "relics" of this sort are thrown away upon them. He should have known that such a freak

[9] "Ode on the Bones of the Immortal Thomas Paine, newly transferred from America to England, by the no less immortal William Cobbett, Esq."

"Sketches of the Life of Billy Cobb and the Death of Tommy Pain, compiled from Original Documents obtained in an Original Manner."

"The Real or Constitutional House that Jack Built," has a cut of Cobbett shouldering a coffin. The character of this pamphlet may be judged by the following, addressed to the "first gent:"—

> "This is the prince of a generous mind,
> The friend of his country and all mankind,
> Who, lending his ear to the dictates of truth," &c.

As for the newspaper rhymesters, the episode of "Cobbett and Paine" was quite a godsend to them. And the reader who knows anything of election-squibbing will recall his own delights, when he thinks of the fun the Preston and Coventry people came to have over these poor bones.

as his could only be safely performed, by an organized and influential public movement; and then, only, with a certainty of having to face disagreeable controversy. That the bones will be wanted, some day, may be safely predicted; knowing what we do of THE WHIRLIGIG OF TIME. But the business of raising a monument, recording the wisdom and political virtues of Thomas Paine, will scarcely be within the scope of that man's powers who "stands alone."[1]

Again, a subject which had greatly disturbed the minds of Mr. Cobbett's friends was his relation with Sir Francis Burdett. The latter had advanced money to Cobbett (or to Wright for him), and there appeared little probability of its being repaid. Mr. Cobbett had acknowledged the debt (with some sort of protest, however), and promised to repay it, after he was enabled to provide for his family again.

Sir Francis Burdett had already inspired suspicion, in the breasts of the Reformers, as not being in earnest. He had called upon the people, for several years past, to "rally" and to "come

[1] Oddly enough, there was another case of "bone-grubbing," just after this escapade of Cobbett's. The remains of Major André were exhumed and brought to England; and, considering that that unlucky officer met with the usual fate of a detected spy, the circumstance afforded Mr. Cobbett a fair opportunity of returning some of the pleasantries. As André's name has not yet been dropped from the biographical dictionaries, his story will be found in "Chambers's Encyclopædia," and elsewhere.

forward," and so on; but would back out of it at a critical juncture. He was still "Westminster's pride and England's glory," in the hands of a Westminster clique; but, when the troubles of 1816-1817 began, he seemed to shrink from the cause of Reform. Perhaps he dreaded Republicanism, or had some other good reason for his backwardness. Certain it is, that, just before the opening of parliament in 1817, when all the leaders were wanted at their posts, Burdett was not there. And, upon Lord Cochrane proposing an amendment to the Address, which would have at least produced debate, Sir Francis allowed the motion to drop without a seconder. Now, this was so much like all the Whig popularity-hunting; and this end so much like the end of that,—that Cartwright and all the hearty Reformers ceased to put great faith in Burdett; and Mr. Cobbett only spoke the feelings of all, when he indignantly pointed out what was very like a betrayal of the cause. The only explanation that appears to have been obtained from Burdett was a protest against "being used as a puppet."

Among the newspaper anecdotes which synchronized with Cobbett's departure for America, was one concerning the debt of 3000*l.* to Sir Francis. This was the first the public heard of it. And, upon Mr. Cobbett proceeding to castigate Burdett for his lukewarmness, people called it "ingrati-

tude" and "inconsistency." This, however, might have been treated with contempt, but for the publication of some correspondence in the *Examiner*, which made it appear that Mr. Cobbett meant to repudiate the debt; a construction which it was quite possible to form, without knowing all the circumstances, and by the easy process of reading "extracts."[2]

So, after Cobbett's return from America, almost till the last year of his life, his money-affairs with Burdett were repeatedly cropping up, both in the newspapers and in the *Political Register*. The matter is not creditable to either of the parties. And when, after Cobbett's death, upon a proposal to raise some kind of memorial, Sir Francis sent the 3000*l.* bond to the committee, telling them that they could take his subscription out of that; it looked a very unworthy proceeding on the part of a man, who had really owed a vast deal of his popularity and distinction to Mr. Cobbett's zealous advocacy. Burdett's vanity was at least equal to Cobbett's egotism; and neither could forgive the other, after their special weaknesses had been shown up at each other's hands. Several endeavours at reconciliation were made, on the part of mutual friends, but they ended in nothing.

[2] *Vide* "Correspondence between Mr. Cobbett, Mr. Tipper, and Sir Francis Burdett." "A Letter to the Friends of Liberty, on the Correspondence, &c., by Thomas Dolby." "A Defence of Mr. Cobbett, against the Intrigues of Sir Francis Burdett and his partisans."

Another episode, of this period, gave still more trouble to Mr. Cobbett. There was an influential batch of politicians in Westminster, of which Francis Place was one of the leaders. Their liberalism went in the line of electoral purity, and verged toward Republicanism; and their favourites were Burdett and Hobhouse. At the election of June, 1818, Henry Hunt stood as a candidate, and this clique (known as the Rump Committee) opposed him with all their might. The secretary and agent was one Thomas Cleary, who had given much aid as promoter of Hampden clubs throughout the country, and was studying as a barrister. Mr. John Wright was connected with this set; and, being in possession of several hundred of Cobbett's old letters,[3] found one among them which reflected strongly upon Hunt's private character. We have already perused it, as the reader will recollect.[4] Wright showed this to Francis Place, and Place showed it to Cleary, who read it out to the electors, on the first opportunity: adding, "In the language of Mr. Cobbett, I have only to say, 'He's a sad fellow, beware of him.'" So electoral purity draws the line at some point or other: in this case, at the point outside of which lies a detestable breach of confidence.

[3] Which letters, preserved in two quarto volumes, have happily become the property of the nation.

[4] *Vide* page 65.

The consequences may be imagined. Mr. Cobbett first heard of it through the medium of a New York paper, and lost his temper over it. Both Cobbett and Burdett had associated with Mr. Hunt, of late years: had gone sporting with him, and had even been under the same roof with "the lady." This was stronger in Mr. Cobbett's recollection than the memory of his first scanty acquaintance with Hunt; and a hasty note, written more than ten years ago, had entirely faded from his memory. So he, in his first outburst of anger, charged Cleary with forging the letter; and, afterward, on several occasions, represented Wright as a rogue, "unparalleled in the annals of infamy;" giving his readers a graphic story of how the latter had falsified accounts; and how his little son had been a witness (in Newgate) of the "big drops of sweat standing upon the caitiff's brow," upon the occasion of his detection.

Now, this was quite indefensible. And the only excuse that can be made is that Mr. Cobbett had been gradually losing his habitual coolness and calmness in the face of calumny. Instead of his old habit of treating it with contempt, he had begun the practice of answering misrepresentation: the very thing that your scandal-monger likes. And, in this case, three thousand miles away, with at least three months' interval between a calumny and the possibility of a retort; and with a growing

habit of nursing political and personal grievances: it is no wonder that he flew into a passion; and, in the end, so exposed Mr. Cleary that many of the latter's friends refused to have any more dealings with him, or even to hold discourse with him. So, upon Cobbett's return to England, Cleary challenged him to fight; of course to no purpose. He then brought an action, laying the damages at two thousand pounds. The jury showed what they thought of the matter, by awarding him forty shillings.[8]

A few days afterward, the case of *Wright* v. *Cobbett* was heard.

This was a more serious affair. The imputations against Wright were quite needless, even if they could be justified. And the defendant, at the last moment, withdrew his plea of justification from the record, and based his defence upon the fact that his son (and not himself) was the present proprietor of the *Register:* that his sons were in the habit of altering his manuscript at their discretion. These technical pretences, so commonly resorted to, might have answered very well in the hands of

[8] Brougham was Cleary's counsel. Cobbett very ably defended himself, and produced one of his best jokes on this occasion. Referring to the plaintiff's diminished prospects at the bar, alleged to be in consequence of these events, he added, "It was held to be a crime, even by poachers, to destroy young birds; and how criminal, then, must he (the defendant) be, if he really had *crushed a lawyer in the egg!*"

a practised lawyer; but, with the "defendant in person," it was like a child playing with edged tools. And against Scarlett, too, one of the cleverest counsel of the day; a man who hated the Reform set; and who had, in the House of Commons, alluded to Cobbett as a "contemptible scribbler," and, on the present occasion, could go out of his way to say how much he approved of Cobbett's early estimate of Paine, and his former writings generally. He maintained that the letter which Cleary read, and which had caused all the trouble, was one intended for publication, although the judge (at the former trial) had very strongly reprobated Cleary's conduct. Whilst he, of course, enjoyed a complete triumph over the withdrawal of the plea of justification, and the clumsy efforts of the defendant to make his sons responsible.

The folly and conceit of appearing "in person" was never more signally exemplified; especially as Mr. Cobbett had, just then, his hands full over the poor Queen,[6] and over his own chaotic pecuniary

[6] Cobbett's action with reference to Queen Caroline is another of those matters which caused unmitigable hatred on the part of the "first gent" and his ministers. He had contributed, during the year 1811, to the republication of the notorious "Book," the entire impression of which was supposed, till then, to have been destroyed. On the Queen's return to England, in 1820, the Reformers took up her cause with great zeal, under some impression that their own was identified therewith. Whilst Brougham, and Denman, and the leading Whigs patronized her in public; Dr. Parr, Alderman Wood, and Mr. Cobbett were at her elbow behind the scenes. The cele-

affairs; and it was sufficiently punished by the result. The jury deliberated for nearly two hours, and brought in a verdict of 1000*l.* damages.

These things were "much against him," as Lord Brougham would say. The press got into the way of saying that Cobbett had lost all character, and all respect, and so on. New pamphlets came out: the patriot was really down, this time; and his fate squared so neatly with all that had been predicted of him, and of every subverter of the constitution.

But, there are reputations, and reputations:

> "Pygmies are pygmies still, though perch'd on alps,
> And pyramids are pyramids in vales!"

And, whilst a good name is not to be thought lightly of, it is not every one's esteem that can be considered man's best and highest reward. The hollow, specious, moral judgments of mankind, when under the dominion of prejudice, are not the standards by which to judge the men of life and earnestness: the men whose convictions, and not whose personal interests, mark their path. And, in the case in point: the moral judgment of all the

brated letter from the Queen to the King (which was returned unopened, but read with eager delight by all the nation) was from Cobbett's pen.

The whole story is graphically told by Cobbett, in the "History of the Regency and Reign of George IV.," and his cotemporary articles will be found in the *Registers* of 1820.

toad-eaters and the place-hunters of the day could hardly be a desirable standard, wherewith to gauge the character of a man whose faults lay just upon the surface; whose faults could, by no possible twist or distortion of idea, be shown to proceed from bad impulses.[1]

[1] Among the anti-Cobbett literature of this period which has not utterly perished, may be named,—

"The Political Death of Mr. William Cobbett" (Edinburgh, 1820), a short collection of slanders, intermingled with just sufficient truth to float it.

"The Book of Wonders" (London, 1821), an occasional publication. The second number was a *verbatim* report of the trial in Wright *v.* Cobbett, illustrated with notes.

"Cobbett's Gridiron: written to warn Farmers of their Danger, and to put Landowners, Mortgagees, Lenders, Borrowers, the Labouring, and indeed all Classes of the Community on their Guard" (London, 1822).

"The True Patriot," No. 1, May 15, 1824,—should have been entitled "The Truthful Hypocrite."

"Cobbett's Reflections on Religion," and "Cobbett's Reflections on Politics" (Sunderland, *circa* 1820-1), were "loyal" selections from his early writings.

"The Gridiron; or, Cook's Weekly Register." First number, March 23, 1822. Here are specimens of it:—

["Our present intention is, principally, to exterminate Cobbett from the political world. The time required to effect this, of course, cannot be distinctly defined. . . . .

"In our immediate attacks upon Cobbett, we request our readers to excuse the coarseness of the language adopted."

"Farmers' wives.—It is now but a few years since that an old shameless, wicked fellow rose up from his bed to pray for your husbands' destruction. This wicked fellow's name is no other than Cobbett," &c.]

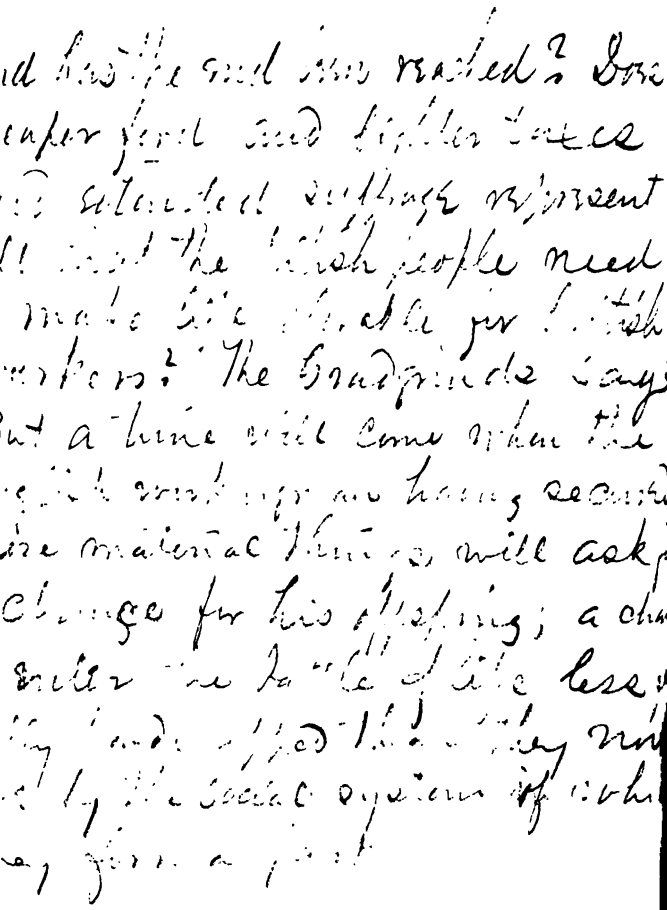
No. 2 speaks of the increasing demand for the first number. No. 3 is reduced to sixpence, for the purpose of affording a more general circulation. No. 4, ? ? ? ? ?

All this anonymous rubbish did more good than harm, as obvious

What "interests" Mr. Cobbett had, were now unmistakably identified with those of the labouring classes of England; and, at last, he had got a good hearing from those classes. The distinction of classes, wantonly and unnecessarily proclaimed for twenty years past, was now confirmed; and the ten years of George the Fourth's reign mark the period of conflict which was partly the result of this forced distinction. The end of this conflict, and the ultimate triumph of the popular cause, is matter of history: the bloodless reformation of 1832 has saved the British Constitution, instead of destroying it. That triumph of principles was the work of neither Whig nor Tory. It came from the provoked and suffering people themselves. The greater the provocation, the deeper the suffering,—the more certain was to be the end: and from them, alone, it came. And, as more light is thrown,

hypocrisy always will, under similar circumstances. A more respectable opponent was Henry White, a well-known Whig writer of the day. People said he was jealous of Cobbett. He was a very able man, and had himself been well abused by the *Times* and other papers, on account of his strict partisanship. After many years of animadversion, he produced "A Calm Appeal to the Friends of Freedom and Reform, on the Double Dealings of Mr. Cobbett, and the baneful tendency of his Writings. With a vindication of the Whigs, and the Patriots of Westminster and the Borough of Southwark, against his Scurrilous and Malignant Aspersions. By Henry White, late editor of the *Independent Whig*, the *Charles James Fox*, the *Independent Observer*, the *Sunday Times*, the *Public Cause*, &c., &c." (London, 1823). Referring to his own party, White says, "What virtue, what wisdom, what real patriotism there is in the country, he knows *they* possess."

from time to time, upon these stirring days, the better can we see who were the real leaders and guiders in Reform; and who was the greatest of them all. For, until this SAMSON arose, the progress of the cause had been little better than a series of ridiculous evasions and desertions.



CHAPTER XXIV.

"THEY COMPLAIN THAT THE TWOPENNY TRASH IS READ."

THE ruin which was overtaking all the agricultural interest during the last years of the Regency, put a finishing stroke to the little estate at Botley. It had been heavily mortgaged for some years past; and upon Mr. Cobbett's return from America, he found himself stripped of everything in the shape of realizable property. The profits from the *Register* were comparatively smaller than of old; for, although the circulation was prodigious, the expense of its distribution was also very great. The establishment of another daily paper [1] probably

[1] *Cobbett's Evening Post* (Wm. C., Jun., printer and publisher, 269, Strand) was started on the 29th January, 1820, and ran for about two months. The early numbers are largely devoted to the Coventry election. On the 28th March a notice is given that the paper will be discontinued, with a remark that, "at the time when this undertaking was resolved on, it was uncertain what one could do, and could not do, in the state of slavery in which the new laws placed the press." The *Register* was missed on one or two occasions, and it was found that the attempt to carry on both would be "to

added to his pecuniary difficulties. At last there was no resource but bankruptcy, which took place in the course of 1820. The creditors were few, and acted very generously; and Mr. Cobbett afterwards refers to them with the kindliest feelings. One of them, indeed (Mr. George Rogers, of Southampton), went further; and paid the damages and costs in Wright's action, which followed very soon after the certificate in bankruptcy was issued. The low ebb at which his fortunes now stood, are best described in Cobbett's own words:—

"In January, 1821, my family, after having for years been scattered about like a covey of partridges that had been sprung and shot at, got once more together, in a hired lodging at Brompton; and our delight, and our mutual caresses, and our tears of joy, experienced no abatement at our actually finding ourselves with only *three shillings* in the whole world; and at my having to borrow from a friend the money to pay for the paper and print off the then next Saturday's *Register!*"

To live in London, however, or even near it without "fruits and flowers," was out of the question. Accordingly, we find Mr. Cobbett soon settled at Kensington, cultivating a plot of land as a seed-farm; and his politics and his satire are, thenceforth, mingled with the mysteries of trees and turnips, corn

make both indifferent;" besides, people both preferred the *Weekly Register* and found that Cobbett could, in that, do better justice to his powers.

and apples. Unable to resume the practice of planting, for himself, upon a large scale, Mr. Cobbett gave a great impulse to the formation of plantations, on the part of gentlemen who could afford to do it. His old friend, Lord Folkestone, was especially encouraged to improve the grounds at Coleshill by further plantings, and covered many acres with his favourite acacia, then better known under its American name of locust-tree. So great, indeed, became the rage for this particular tree, that more applicants came to Kensington for the seeds than could be served with those imported from America; and Cobbett actually had to purchase them sometimes from the London nurserymen, in whose shops they were lying neglected under another name.

The story of Cobbett's planting and seed-farming would make an interesting volume. It became the fashion, after his death, to decry his successes,[2] and to minimize his qualities as a farmer; and perhaps with some justice, as regards this latter part of his life, as his hands were always too full of more stirring matters. But he did unquestionable service to the art of planting; and in promoting the restoration of woods and coppices, which had so fatally suffered from the felling and clearing brought about by the war, and by the efforts made by so many persons to save their property by the sacrifice of its timber. And, besides this practical part of the

[2] *Vide* Loudon; also Donaldson's "Agricultural Biography."

business: ever ready to put his notions into print, he must needs produce more books, in order to popularize his plans; books, however, which have met with comparative neglect, of late years, on account of their special nature. Rural economy and domestic economy are matters which, treated as social arts, get so modified by the rapidly-changing currents of our time, that the mode of one generation is lost amid the fads of the next. But the peculiar merit of Cobbett's books was their readableness; and, whilst such matters as the Currency and the Corn Laws could be rendered entertaining by his facile pen, it was natural that rural affairs, in which he delighted, and amongst which he heartily believed that the highest domestic felicity was to be found, should derive from that pen the highest charms. There never lived, probably, a writer to equal Cobbett in rural description: one who could, in the midst of some angry polemic, so readily turn off for a moment and present his reader with a country picture; perfectly life-like, glowing with colour and realism: who could make a mere gardening book entertaining.

Whilst in Long Island, Mr. Cobbett had prepared an "American Gardener," which he published, soon after his return to England; dedicating it to one of his neighbours out there. The "English Gardener," published a few years later, was a reproduction of this, adapted to the differing conditions of his own

country. "The Woodlands," published early in 1825; a new edition of Tull's old book on "Horse-hoeing Husbandry," in 1822; and a guide for the cultivation of Indian corn, completed a useful series of books on rural affairs. All these are marked by sufficient egotism; but they are far more practical than the general run of such works. There is so much painstaking description, and so much lively illustration, that the reader is forced to take an interest in what he is reading. It is almost impossible for one to take in hand the "Woodlands," without wishing to become a planter.

The "Cottage Economy" was a small work, exclusively for the use of cottagers, with the aim of bringing them back to the habits and ways of their grandparents; in reviving the arts of making bread and brewing beer at home; of keeping cows, poultry, and bees; and, generally, showing the way to become independent of shopkeepers and tax-gatherers. All this Cobbett had seen in his youth, and he was determined to revive these things, if it was to be done. And the immediate popularity of these rural books, coming, as they did, at a period when people were making most desperate efforts to keep the wolf from the door, showed forth an unquestionable fact,—that the people wanted sympathy and guidance, and the means of self-improvement, and were well satisfied to get so much from the man who was fighting their battles for them in another way.

As one example of the amount of influence Cobbett obtained over people, in minor domestic matters, the following may be given:—From a farmer's daughter in Connecticut, who had sent over to the Society of Arts a straw-bonnet of her own making, he obtained some particulars as to the mode of preparation. Having published the matter in the *Register*, an importer of Italian straw applied to Mr. Cobbett, requesting to know whether he could undertake to get some American straw imported. Upon seeing some samples of the straw from which the Leghorn hats were made, and looking at it "with the eyes of a farmer," he perceived that it consisted of dry oat, wheat, and rye stalks, mixed with those of certain common grass plants. This discovery made it clear to him that there was no need of importation; and, proceeding in his usual energetic way, he soon had straw hats and bonnets prepared from English grasses. This opened up a new industry, not only in the homes of the labourers, but on the part of some manufacturers; and its success was so far recognizable, that the Society of Arts, in the year 1823, gave Mr. Cobbett their silver medal, as a token of their approbation. ENVY caught sight of this, of course, and asserted itself as usual, with newspaper paragraphs headed, "The Society of Arts humbugged at last!" and so on; but what was that, to disturb the well-earned delight of the man who could ride

about the country, and see and hear for himself many a poor cottager at work, otherwise unable to earn a livelihood: who could print letters of grateful thanks from every quarter of the kingdom?

The attempt to naturalize the maize plant was another singular effort of Mr. Cobbett's; the complete success of which, however, was too much to expect from the English climate. But, by the application of a good deal of zealous labour and attention, many persons did succeed in producing good crops; and there was not only bread made from "Cobbett's corn," but paper was made from the stalks.

A most particular aversion of Mr. Cobbett's was the potato.

"This root is become a favourite because it is the suitable companion of misery and filth. It can be seized hold of before it be half ripe, it can be raked out of the ground with the paws, and without the help of any utensils except, perhaps, a stick to rake it from the fire, can be conveyed into the stomach, in the space of an hour. We have but one step farther to go, and that is, to eat it raw, side by side with our bristly fellow-creatures, who, by-the-bye, reject it as long as they can get at any species of grain, or at any other vegetable. I can remember when the first acre of potatoes was planted in a field, in the neighbourhood of the place where I was born; and I very well remember that even the poorest of the people would not eat them. They called them hog-potatoes; but now they are become a considerable

portion of the diet of those who raise the bread for others to eat."

This passage is from a Botley *Register*, of 1813; but it will represent Cobbett's notions and feelings on the matter during all his life—from the scarcity-period at the beginning of the century (when bills were introduced in Parliament to "encourage" the growth of potatoes; and Ministers of State, at their grand dinners, used fried potato-cakes, as a substitute for bread), to the time when he came to predict a disastrous Irish famine. And it would be hard to deny the force of his arguments; the burden of which was, that in order to keep a people in a condition of semi-barbarism, little else was necessary than to cause potatoes to be the general food of the country. A knife (he pointed out) which even savages rarely dispense with, is not required by the feeder on potatoes. No forethought, and only a minimum of industrious attention, are needed. The love of ease, so natural to mankind, soon prevails, in the absence of incitement to labour—a safe commonplace; but one of vital importance to be borne in mind, when the thoughtless, and the ignorant, and the purse-proud are content to see a whole class of their fellow-beings ranked just above the swine.

Some curious notions used to get afloat, concerning cheap food for the poor. There was the

Duke of Richmond's celebrated discovery of the nourishing qualities of curry-powder; and the recipe of another clever fellow, for making *flint-soup*. Milk, produced by animals fed upon stewed straw, was discovered to have great fattening properties. . . . .

Yet, with all this considerate device, the ungrateful wretches still whined for their beer and bread and bacon, the dietary of their forefathers. And the editor of a certain "diabolical" publication persisted in telling them that they ought to have it, and they could have it; for, at the time that the ordinary Wiltshire fare was 1½ *pound of bread and a halfpenny* per day, he was giving to his own labourers, at Barn Elm, 1 lb. of meat or bacon, 1½ lb. of flour, besides cheese and beer, per day; and three shillings a week in money.

And there was so much wanton cruelty and insolence, under the poor-relief system of those days. Gangs of labourers would be set to work, the leader having a bell round his neck; men were set to *draw* carts, like so many convicts, instead of using wheelbarrows; and, when there was no immediate work on hand, you might see one carrying a heavy stone up and down; or digging a hole in the ground one day, and filling it up again the next. How all this went on, in England, for ten or twelve years, scarce half a century ago, is past comprehending. It is, however, a fact, that people could not only permit

it, but permit it without shame; and could venture to call those persons "diabolical villains," who blushed for the country which proclaimed itself "the envy of surrounding nations."

Those who blushed for their country: those who spent their lives in the endeavour to arrest the hand of her oppressors: justly scorned the pleas of submission and contentment, put forth by many well-meaning persons in the shape of "religious" tracts. The man before us (one of that class who practise a good deal more than they preach; who act righteously before they inculcate righteousness on the part of others) could only see, in these precious handbills, inducements to submit to social degradation. But, in truth, acute suffering on the part of the labouring-classes was teaching them as much as Mr. Cobbett, or any one else, could do. To see the name of some fat pluralist on the title-page of a tract against "repining;" to listen to advice and exhortation, based on the comforting prospects of another and better world, on the part of men who were themselves making sure of this one; to see the names of the committees and promoters of this officious piety, and find that they were, in many instances, the names of those who had given a helping-hand to repression; and who continued to inculcate passive obedience, and the extreme naughtiness of the poor wretches in wanting to know something about the real causes of their

misery, was too much for millions of the unprivileged and unendowed. They could see, plainly enough, who were the real Sowers of the Wind. And, perhaps, the Church of England has come to see, for herself, how we have reaped a whirlwind of religious indifference; in spite of "revivals," and "restorations," and "extensions," and "functions," and potterings without number.[3]

Not the least important contribution to the cause of the people, on the part of Mr. Cobbett, was his "History of the Reformation." A curiosity in literature; a clumsy, hastily-drawn indictment; the sport of Protestant controversialists; the work yet served a noble purpose. The scale of misrepresentation and calumny had been too long on one side,

[3] One of Cobbett's bits of "verse" is upon the wickedness of *repining*:—

Come, little children, list' to me
While I describe your duty,
And kindly lead your eyes to see
Of lowliness the beauty.

'Tis true your bony backs are bare,
Your lips too dry for spittle,
Your eyes as dead as whitings' are,
Your bellies growl for vict'al;

But, dearest children, oh! believe,
Believe not treach'rous senses!
'Tis they your infant hearts deceive,
And lead into offences.

When frost assails your joints by day,
And lice by night torment ye,
'Tis to remind you oft to pray,
And of your sins repent ye.

At parching lips when you repine,
And when your belly hungers,
You covet what, by right Divine,
Belongs to Boroughmongers.

Let dungeons, gags, and hangman's noose,
Make you content and humble,
Your heav'nly crown you'll surely lose
If here on earth you grumble.

and there wanted a thumping weight to restore the balance. And when the world discovered that the story of the Reformation in England had its very dark as well as its very bright side: when people learned what utterly selfish ends it had promoted: the world took a long step forward; stepped up to scrutinize it closely. And if the world found that the rough rude hand of this literary pre-raphaelite had brought some features into disgusting prominence, it was no more than was to be expected, sooner or later. The mere controversy, concerning the mutual recriminations of Papists and Protestants, and concerning their cutting of each other's throats, is nothing. All that will be going on when the New Zealander comes. But the political nature of that great convulsion, and its important social results, particularly with regard to the shameless transfer of property into the hands of court-favourites, had need to be shown up with a relentless hand.

The occasion, of this "History of the Reformation" being projected, was the rapidly-growing feeling on the subject of Emancipation. Mr. Cobbett had long proclaimed equality of political rights for the Catholic, the Unitarian, and the Jew; and regarded them as oppressed people, as long as their theological disabilities remained.[4] We laugh

[4] "When I hear the Dissenters complaining of persecution, I cannot help reflecting on the behaviour of some of them towards the Catholics, with respect to whom common decency ought to teach

now-a-days, at such fears as then existed concerning the removal of these disabilities; but we are out of the wood; and the few persons of superior mental stature who, in those times, persisted in declaring to the cowards beneath them, that there was more safety in moving on, than in standing still, had to

them better behaviour. But, whether I hear in a Churchman or a Dissenter abuse of the Catholics, I am equally indignant; when I hear men, no two of whom can agree in any one point of religion, and who are continually dooming each other to perdition; when I hear them join in endeavouring to shut the Catholic out from political liberty on account of his religious tenets, which they call idolatrous and damnable, I really cannot feel any compassion for either of them, let what will befall them. There is, too, something so impudent, such cool impudence, in their affected contempt of the understanding of the Catholics, that one cannot endure it with any degree of patience. You hear them all boasting of their *ancestors;* you hear them talking of the English Constitution as the pride of the world; you hear them bragging of the deeds of the Edwards and the Henrys; and of their wise and virtuous and brave forefathers; and, in their next breath, perhaps, you hear them speak of the Catholics as the vilest and most stupid of creatures, and as wretches doomed to perdition; when they ought to reflect that all these wise and virtuous and brave forefathers of theirs were Catholics, that they lived and died in the Catholic faith, and that, notwithstanding their Catholic faith, they did not neglect whatever was necessary to the freedom and greatness of England. It is really very stupid, as well as very insolent, to talk in this way of the Catholics, to represent them as doomed to perdition who compose five-sixths of the population of Europe; to represent as beastly ignorant those amongst whom the brightest geniuses and the most learned men in the world have been and are to be found; but still, the most shocking part of our conduct is to affect to consider as a sort of outcasts of God as well as man those who have, through all sorts of persecution, adhered to the religion of *their* and *our* forefathers. There is something so unnatural, so monstrous, in a line of conduct in which we say that our forefathers are all in hell, that no one but a brutish bigot can hear of it with patience."—*Register*, xix. 1286.

make their voices heard above a fearful din, of incrimination, and calumny, and petty party strifes.

So, by the time that the cause of Emancipation had taken hold of the public mind: when the press, at last, took it up warmly, and O'Connell was leading the agitation in Ireland: Cobbett had lashed himself into a perfect fury, toward the opponents of religious equality, and toward the inheritors of the Church domains. The ease-loving character of the parsons of his day, the growth of a plutocracy, and the debased condition of the poor: spake too ominously of national decadence. The increasing perils of the country, with all parties trying, at last, to propitiate the Parliamentary Reformers at the same time that they had mortal dread of them, kept his mind at fever-heat; and Mr. Cobbett was less than ever disposed to stay his voice or his pen, when conviction had once seized him. He had nothing to gain, and nothing to lose, by expressing his convictions. Given a fight, he was certain to be seen in the thickest of it.

The urgency of the matter, and the readiness of the public mind to accept a broader view of the Reformation story, were shown, by the immediate success of the History. Published weekly, at a low price, the early numbers reached a sale of upwards of forty thousand; and very little time elapsed, before the work had flown all over Europe and America. The fanatics did not like it, and they

don't like it now.[5] There are persons about us, in these latter days, who consider Emancipation as one of our great national sins, on account of which we shall yet be heavily scourged. "LET THEM CURSE, BUT BLESS THOU!"

[5] An unusual number of "answers" to Cobbett's book have been produced, some of which are named below. Out of the whole lot there is not one that does not, once again, manifest the inability of your controversialist, blinded with dogmatic solicitude, to escape from his mental prison-house. The reader may be tempted to look at the last on the list, as being a production of recent times; but the chances are against his cutting open any pages beyond the introductory chapter. To say no more than this argues great forbearance on the part of the present writer.

"Catholic Miracles; illustrated by George Cruikshank; to which is added a Reply to Cobbett's Defence of the Reformation."

"A True History of the Protestant Reformation in England and Ireland; showing how that event has Enriched and Elevated the Main Body of the People in those Countries; in a Series of Letters addressed to all sensible and just Englishmen. In Reply to William Cobbett. By a Protestant." (In threepenny numbers, 1 to 5 only published. London, 1825.)

"The Protestant Vindicator; or, A Refutation of the Calumnies contained in Cobbett's History of the Reformation; including Remarks on the Principal Topics of the Popish Controversy. By Robert Oxlad." (Serial. ? 14 numbers. London, 1826.)

"The Epistles of Ignatius and Polycarp. . . . . With an Appendix, containing Notes, in which the Leading Arguments of Mr. Cobbett's History are refuted. . . . ." (1827.)

"A Brief History of the Protestant Reformation; in a Series of Letters addressed to William Cobbett. . . . . By the Author of 'The Protestant.'" (1826; new ed., Glasgow, 1831.)

"The Social Effects of the Reformation. . . . . By a Fellow of the Statistical Society." ("From a Series of Letters which appeared . . . . during the years 1824 and 1825." London, 1852.)

"A Reply to Cobbett's 'History of the Protestant Reformation in England and Ireland.' Compiled and Edited by Charles Hastings Collette." (London, 1869.)

The thing did not aim at proselytism; the writer had no intention, nor any expectation, of that. He did expect, however, to see thousands and thousands of converts to the cause of tolerance; and there can be no doubt whatever, that Cobbett's "History of the Reformation" gave immense impulse to that cause. And, if the book had only been called "The History of the Great Spoliation," the fanatics would have been disarmed, and perhaps joined with the author in his passionate denunciations; instead of wilfully and wickedly misconstruing his motives, and distorting his arguments.

But the prejudice with which we go through the world is quite as gross as the ignorance with which we enter it; and when we have stuck up such a word as *Reformation*, and fallen down and worshipped it for a time, we soon become incapable of forming just judgments.

The list of Mr. Cobbett's books, which were directly intended to help the cause to which his life was devoted, is complemented by adding to the above-named, "The Poor Man's Friend;" "Twelve Sermons;" and "The Emigrant's Guide." The first of these he called the most learned work that he had ever written. It consisted principally of short papers on the rights and duties of the poor; which were published monthly, and addressed to the work-

ing-people of Preston, after his unsuccessful contest at the election. But the Sermons are better deserving of the palm of superiority. The reader cannot open a page of this volume, without being powerfully struck with Cobbett's ability to handle any subject illustrating man's duty to his neighbour. Of course, there is a little touch of politics underlying it all, although only perceptible to one familiar with his political writings; but it is not one whit too much to say, that this volume of sermons would do honour to any Divine, in any Christian Church.

The "Sermons" had a tremendous popularity, for several years. As monthly tracts, they had been originally published in avowed rivalry to the vapid productions of religious doctrinaires, and of the preachers of contentment and resignation under conditions of obvious misgovernment. Some of the clergy had the good sense to use Cobbett's sermons in their own pulpits; it is to be hoped without generally avowing the source of their inspiration. One reflection persists in intruding itself upon the reader of these tracts; that when men come to enter the ministry, after having been buffeted about the world a bit, and having learned something of human nature, instead of being delivered from a cloister (as from some manufactory), they will understand their business better, and soon have less cause to whine about the "spread" of infidelity and

immorality. Until then, things will go on as they do now.

That racy volume, "Rural Rides," came forth to the world in a sufficiently unpretending manner. It was a mere reprint of articles from the *Register*, which had been generally written at the close of a day's journey, and without any special object but current reports upon the condition of the people and the country. But none of Cobbett's writings have been so much quoted as the "Rural Rides," a fact which is easily understood, considering the circumstance that what would deter most people from literary drudgery, was the very reverse to Mr. Cobbett. A day's exercise would impart fresh vigour to his mind, and wings to his pen; and the result is, in this case, one of the very liveliest books in the English language.

It was in the autumn of 1821 that the first journal was undertaken. Cobbett's own affairs were getting more comfortable; he lived quietly at Kensington, not often troubling himself with the publishing-office; and the experiment, of going round to see the farmers for himself, was just in his vein. Agricultural distress was nearly at its worst, and the troubles of the farmers formed the leading topic of the day. Beef and mutton fetched an average of $4\frac{1}{2}d.$ per lb., in the month of November; and all rural produce was at a similarly reduced

figure. So Mr. Cobbett started off, on horseback, through Berkshire and Wiltshire to Gloucester and Hereford, returning by Oxford to Kensington; with such satisfaction, that he spent much of the winter in similar journeys through parts of southern England. All his intense interest in rural affairs, and the welfare of the country folk: his close observations on soil, and climate, and produce, and his sarcastic reflections on domestic politics, were here served up for his readers in better style than ever. And, at last, having employed a part of the ensuing four or five years in the same manner, and reprinting the journals into a volume, the result was a picture of the cotemporary domestic affairs of England which it would be vain to seek elsewhere. In short, given an inquiry into the condition of the people, at this troublesome period, there could not, possibly, be better means of enlightenment than that of taking Cobbett's "Rural Rides;" and, making it the basis of such inquiry, to group around it the necessary information and statistics furnished by official reports. While, to the value of Cobbett's accurate and vivid descriptions of rural scenery, the use made of the "Rural Rides," on the part of guide-book makers, is sufficient testimony.

The more important result, personally, of these rural journeys, was the frequent opportunity afforded to Mr. Cobbett of meeting the farmers at their market dinners and county meetings. This added

immensely to his influence; his opinions, especially on the currency, began to take hold upon men, who had hitherto read his writings with some degree of dislike and dread; and a very short time elapsed, before there were found more Cobbettites in the country towns, than in the larger centres of population.

Another series of rural rides was commenced in 1829. These were more distinctively political tours; and extended to more distant parts, including the manufacturing towns of Yorkshire and Lancashire. The reception Mr. Cobbett met with, and the overflowing attendances upon his lectures, showed, in a surprising degree, the hold he had obtained upon the minds of the working-people. Parliamentary Reform was, at last, no longer to be delayed; and while the Russells and the Greys were getting a due share of credit, for their endeavours to force on the Great Plunge, there was no questioning to whom principally belonged the distinction of having made it inevitable.

CHAPTER XXV.

"I HAVE PLEADED THE CAUSE OF THE WORKING-PEOPLE, AND I SHALL NOW SEE THAT CAUSE TRIUMPH."

THE disinclination on the part of Mr. Cobbett to become a member of Parliament, which had long characterized his taste as a public character, was now changed into an earnest determination the other way. At any time since 1803 he could have done so, either by the good offices of Mr. Windham, or of Viscount Folkestone. But a close borough was his abomination; and his dislike for late hours and London smoke, and his general feeling of contempt for the character of the existing representation, rendered a seat in the House of Commons anything but an object of ambition. Besides, he held, for a long time, the notion, that he could render better services to his country as a representative of the press.

The daring outrages on the popular liberties, however, which had begun under the Regency,

changed all this. The character of the House was still pretty much the same, even with the accession of lucky war-contractors and stock-jobbers; and the type of ministerialists was still that of the Perceval set, which had existed since 1807. But now, under Habeas Corpus Suspension, the outlook has changed:—

"The *press* is a very powerful engine. Corruption trembles at the very thought of it. The press has done wonderful things. But, great as I know its power to be, I know it to be a mere trifle compared to *a seat in Parliament*, filled by an able, a sober, an industrious, an active, a vigilant, a resolute, an experienced, and an incorruptible man, who would devote his time and his mind to the service of the country. To be sure, *one* man could do comparatively little, without the aid of at least *another*. . . . . One man, such as I have described, would soon make *other men*. A knot of such men would, in a short time, grow together; and against such a knot, corruption would not live a year."

It is the midst of the "repression" period, in the winter of 1817-18, when the news reaches him at Long Island, of men suffering severe penalties for acts of violence. He thus addresses the electors of Coventry, begging them to have "but a little *patience*." . . . "Let us bear in mind, that a *people* never dies; and let us also bear in mind the final success which, in all their struggles, crowned the patience, the perseverance, the public spirit and the

valour of our forefathers, who never set to work against oppression without subduing it in the end." . . . . But:—"I am against all desperate means. I am for trying all the *gentle means* that remain; and, as I have just said, the putting of proper men into Parliament appears to me to be amongst the most efficient of those means."

Some few weeks after Cobbett's return to England, George the Third died. A general election shortly ensued, and the opportunity of contesting one of the seats for Coventry then occurred. The voters resident in London had been for some time preparing, by public meetings, to advance Cobbett's claims on the constituency; and he now presented himself in the city, being received with acclamations on the part of many thousands of people.

But the acclamations of the "lower orders," as they drew Mr. Cobbett's vehicle into and around the town, were not voting-power. The election was like elections ordinarily were in those days. Fighting, stabbing, spitting; swearing, and slandering: little hired regiments of roughs prevented anything like fair play; and, although Cobbett headed the poll on the first day, his ultimate failure was complete. Indeed, upon the second day, it was impossible for his supporters to get near the polling-booth, without the risk of being stabbed.[1]

[1] Mr. Wooler had come to see his error in having joined the howl against Cobbett's "flight" to America, and now warmly advocated

The constituency of Coventry was a very fair one of which to make trial; being a populous manufacturing place, containing a good body of reformers, and electors numbering about 2500. But the corporation was dead against the popular candidate, actively supporting his opponents (Edward Ellice, merchant, and Peter Moore, nabob); and a cartload of money was spent in treating and ruffianism. Mr. Cobbett's expenses were defrayed partly by a small subscription.

It was six years before another opportunity occurred of meeting a popular constituency, with any prospect of success. But the question was kept alive, of a seat in Parliament. Reformers were sanguine that the franchise was on the eve of being broadened; and the yeomanry were beginning to join them,—a circumstance which brought into being a more influential class of adherents to Mr. Cobbett and his views. One of the more zealous and active of these new friends was Sir Thomas Beevor, a young baronet of Norfolk. He had read the *Register* for the first time, during the American exile; and his admiration for the courageous writer so grew upon him,

his claims upon the electors of Coventry. The "Black Dwarf" gives a lively account of this contest; and Wooler, recording its disgraceful incidents, remarks that "the consequences to be apprehended from Mr. Cobbett's appearance in the House of Commons seem to have awakened the most infernal determination to destroy him." See vol. iv. *passim*.

that he at last publicly declared himself a Cobbettite and raised a reform camp in his own county. A proposal was at length made,[2] to hold a meeting in London in support of Cobbett's claims to a seat in Parliament; but it was relinquished, for the present, upon Cobbett's suggestion that they might properly wait until there was a certain prospect of a dissolution.

Meanwhile, all the matters upon which the moderate reformers had set their hearts were canvassed in the *Political Register* from time to time: the Game laws and iniquities, Catholic emancipation, the freedom of public speech, the continued distress of the Agricultural interest; along with minor topics, from the hypocrisies in Parliament, to the extortions of the toll-farmers. Much of Mr. Cobbett's influence had been imperilled by his last American trip, and some of its consequences. But his espousal of the cause of Queen Caroline appears to have completely restored him

[2] It appeared as an advertisement in the *Morning Chronicle*, in these terms:—"To the public.—After communicating with several gentlemen upon the subject, I, in consequence of our unanimous decision, and for the purpose of obtaining the concurrence and co-operation of others, hereby give an invitation to all such gentlemen as wish to see Mr. Cobbett placed in the House of Commons, to meet me at the Crown and Anchor Tavern, in the Strand, London, on Tuesday, the 2nd of March next, in order to devise effectual means for accomplishing that purpose, which, in the present critical situation of the country, I deem to be of the greatest importance to the welfare of that country.—Thomas B. Beevor, Hargham, near Attleborough, Norfolk, Dec. 26, 1823.

to his place in the popular mind; and, from that period onward, not all the base slanders which were still showered upon him, nor even his own extravagant vehemence, could rob him of his power.

In the beginning of the year 1826, a renewed effort was made, led by Sir Thomas Beevor, to bring Mr. Cobbett before some constituency. A meeting was held in Lincoln's Inn Fields, of a very enthusiastic character; and, in a few weeks, several hundred pounds were subscribed. Cobbett, on his part, was determined to make a good fight this time; and he announced that, if elected at all, he must be chosen by persons who chose him for the good of the country, and not for their own profit: that if returned at all, it must be by no corrupt or infamous means; and must be for a place "where some considerable number of the people have something to say in the matter."

Westminster was thought of, and so was Middlesex; both constituencies in the hands of a narrow clique. It was, however, decided to fix upon Preston, as a town affording the desirable element of a very wide suffrage.[3] Accordingly, the prorogation of

[3] According to "A Peep at the Commons" (Lond., 1820), the suffrage at Preston was nearly universal. "Nearly the whole of the inhabitants are Reformers, but, for want of the ballot at elections, undue influence has prevailed, and they have never been enabled to throw off the yoke of slavery. This town, however, is not without numbers who dare, in despite of power, to exercise their political rights."

Parliament, on the 31st of May, found Mr. Cobbett canvassing the electors. A famous contest ensued: the other candidates being the Hon. E. G. Stanley (afterwards 14th Earl Derby), John Wood, merchant, and Captain Barrie, R.N.; the two first being elected. The numbers were, Stanley 3041, Wood 1982, Barrie 1657, Cobbett 995. There was comparatively little ruffianism, but sufficient impediment to fair voting.[4] Mr. Cobbett talked, for some time afterward, of a petition against the return, but the idea was relinquished. Indeed, he took this defeat in remarkably good humour; and proceeded to console himself and his friends, by recounting those triumphs which he could boast of.

Those were not mean triumphs, although principally at the hands of the "lower orders." Flags and music: shouting, exulting, and shaking of hands, attended his progress through Blackburn, Bolton, and Manchester, on his way homeward.[5]

[4] "The general election of 1826 was a severe struggle for the popular candidates, as the most strenuous exertions were made in nearly all the constituencies to get rid of them." *Vide* "Life and Correspondence of T. S. Duncombe," i. 86.

A very complete account of this election will be found in the *Morning Herald* for June, 1826, *passim*. And the curious in such matters may consult "A Collection of Addresses, Squibs, Songs, &c.; together with the Political Mountebank, showing the changeable opinions of Mr. Cobbett, published during the contested election for the Borough of Preston, which commenced June 9th, and ended June 26th, 1826" (Blackburn, 1826).

[5] Sir Thomas Beevor presently showed a balance-sheet of the expenses, by which it appeared the cost was 1843*l.* 9*s.* 5*d.*, whilst

It was now quite obvious that popular candidates stood little or no chance, even in the most popular boroughs, in the existing state of the representation. But the prospect of any reform seemed more distant than ever. In Parliament, the question was practically shelved. Lord John Russell seemed, for the time, to have a persuasion that there was little encouragement to press the matter; and Mr. Canning, soon after becoming premier in 1827, declared that he would oppose parliamentary reform to the end of his life, under whatever shape it might appear. Burdett said that "putting aside all the great questions, including among the rest that of Parliamentary Reform,"[6] he saw sufficient reason to support Canning's administration. And Brougham did not consider that "the late opposition" stood pledged in favour of the question!

Is it any wonder that Whiggism is dead and buried? Call not the Russells and the Greys *Whigs:* they had deserted the practices (considered apart from the professions) of their party before

1701*l.* 4*s.* 6*d.* had been received, leaving a small deficiency for Cobbett to make up. Some of the "subscribers' names" are suggestive:—

A poor disciple of twenty years' standing, 10*s.*

Cobbett, don't be brow-beaten, 20*s.*

Nicodemus, for fear of the Jews, 25*l.*

To assist in getting the country out of its difficulties, so that property may become secure, 10*l.*

Pro bono publico, 2*s.* 6*d.*

[6] "A laugh" here, according to the reporters.

becoming reformers. If Whiggism had been anything besides profession, parliamentary reform would have been undertaken twenty years before; and the Whigs, as a party, had nothing more to do with it, when it was at last undertaken, than to be the vehicle of the country's earnest demand.

This is how it came to pass. The French and Belgian revolutions, in the year 1830, powerfully moved all the populations of Europe; and the news of that double convulsion reached the people of England at one of the saddest periods of their history. To quote Mr. Molesworth,[7] "they were going mad with misery." Machine-breaking and rick-burning kept the country alive with alarm, and sent some poor wretches to banishment or to death. People in the towns began to growl again, as they had growled ten or twelve years before. And the leaders of reform took fresh heart; for they saw that the question could no longer be stifled, with the country in a greater state of degradation than under the Tories of 1817.

So, in the midst of all this trouble, a Reform Bill was introduced. And, looking at the subsequent history of the struggle, and its consequences, it is impossible to avoid this conclusion: that the same prosperity and public confidence, which ensued upon the Act of 1832, might have been the

[7] "History of England from the year 1830," *Introductory Chapter.*

guerdon of the Tories, at the beginning of the century.

The writings of Mr. Cobbett had been very severe upon the Whigs. There does not appear any time, in his whole political life, when he had not more or less distrusted them. And, now that the leaders of the party were in power, the individuals themselves were not spared. Cobbett hit off with accuracy, and with bitterest irony, their waverings and inconsistencies. No sooner had George the Fourth shuffled off this mortal coil, than he announced a "History of the Regency and the late Reign;" and, as the successive numbers of the work appeared, the Whigs had the felicity of seeing their old place-hunting fully exposed. Upon the appointment of Earl Grey's ministry, he declared his belief that they would keep on talking, and speechifying, as of old, without any regard to the promises they had been holding out to the people. Putting a list of twenty-six questions, referring to reform, taxation, tyrannous restraints on liberty, pensions, the six Acts, reduction of the forces, poor laws and game laws, he gave his opinion that none of these things would be touched. And Mr. Cobbett was right; none of these matters were dealt with, except on pressure from without, or on the part of sturdy and independent men of the class of Joseph Hume.

All this told upon the party newly raised to power. Very naturally. But they must have felt a certain insecurity of tenure, to resort to the same mode of retaliation which their political adversaries had exercised, twenty years before. So soon does a lease of power translate itself into a mere parade of force. The Government had not been many weeks in office, before they had the abominable folly to charge Cobbett with being the instigator of the incendiary fires which were then devastating the agricultural districts of England!

This was the basest attempt to destroy Mr. Cobbett that had yet been tried. The end of it was one of the greatest triumphs of his life; and a lesson on political prosecutions, which the other side took much to heart.

The circumstances are these:—The *Political Register* had been, for several years past, sold at the high price of sevenpence (and sometimes one shilling for a double number), on account of the restrictive stamp laws; and it was believed that the circulation was not of that character which would bring the journal into the hands of the labouring classes, to the extent desired. Mr. Cobbett was determined, however, that he would continue, in some way or other, to instruct the labouring-classes in the elements of political and social economy. This became urgent, during the growing excitement of 1830; and the difficulty was met by

reprinting portions in a cheap form, and making a monthly publication thereof. The scornful name which Canning had given to the early cheap *Registers* was the one adopted; and thus, on the 1st of July, came into the world the first number of "Cobbett's Twopenny Trash, or Politics for the Poor." The success of 1816 was repeated, and "Twopenny Trash" flew all over the kingdom: to the very particular horror of the yet undiminished number of pensioners and sinecurists, and of non-resident parsons.[8]

As the winter drew near, the accounts of the rural war were appalling. Incendiary fires, and threatening letters, were sending the farmers out of their wits; and fire-engines and man-traps became part of the farming implements. The labourers, in their ignorance, rendered desperate with hunger, proceeded from outrage to outrage, recklessly destroying food and property; quite unable to

[8] A shoal of pamphlets appeared about this time, on the Reform question, some of them being avowedly anti-Cobbett. Such were, "The Real Character and Tendency of the Proposed Reform;" "Lectures to the Labouring Classes and their Employers in the County of Sussex and elsewhere. Not by a Follower of William Cobbett"; "Imposture Unmasked; in a Letter to the Labourers and Working People of England, on the Schemes of the Church Robbers and Revolutionists with Regard to the Church. By a True Englishman" (with woodcut Vignette of Wm. C., and a "fire" in the distance); "Cobbett's Penny Trash," for Feb., Mar., April, 1831, "price reduced for general distribution,"—afterwards reprinted as "Cobbett's Genuine Twopenny Trash," and having as motto, "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee,"—was on the now well-worn lines.

understand why anybody else could want anything to eat, if they, the producers, were to do without.

In the midst of all this, Mr. Cobbett came amongst them, both on paper and in person; endeavouring to cheer them with hopes of early relief, and to warn them against violence: "Poverty" (he said), "even in its extreme state, gives no man a right to view his rich neighbour with an evil eye, much less to do him mischief on account of his riches."

But he also told the "King's Ministers" how to put a stop to the fires, and that they had better do something, for the poor ignorant rural labourer "would not lay down and die;" endeavoured to palliate the conduct of the labourers, in that they could not live any longer on potatoes and salt; ridiculed the idea that more soldiers were wanted (as had been proposed) in order to keep the country quiet; taunted the Government with their apparent helplessness after so much trumpeting of "glorious" principles and good intentions.

The storm began by a motion, on the part of Mr. Trevor, member for New Romney, aimed at "the publication entitled Cobbett's Register, of the 11th of December;" which he said contained a malicious libel on "the authorities of the State," and a gross and unwarrantable attack on "the members of the Church by law established." The motion was opposed on the ground that a prosecu-

tion, such as was aimed at, would be both impolitic and ill-timed; and that the proper corrective was an improved state of the public mind, by the diffusion of sound knowledge and useful instruction. It was ultimately agreed to leave the matter to the discretion of Ministers.[9]

About the same time, one Thomas Goodman, a Sussex labourer, was sentenced to death for arson; and there appeared in the newspapers a short "confession," which had been wrung from him by a Sussex parson. A few days after, a longer confession appeared; and after that a third, still longer. Mr. Thomas Goodman was eventually respited, and never heard of more; and his escape could only be accounted for, by any rational mind, in his having inculpated Cobbett as the wicked instigator of his crime.[1]

[9] The puerile notions that got afloat in some minds, when in front of difficulty, are very astonishing. Immediately after Trevor's motion was withdrawn, a Member rose to give notice of a motion, praying his Majesty would be graciously pleased to appoint a day for a *general fast* throughout the kingdom! Roars of laughter saluted this new proposal for relieving starvation.

[1] One has only to read these confessions once in order to detect the clumsiness of the forgery. Here is the second one:—

"I Thomas Goodman once heard of one Mr. Cobbit going A bout gaving out lactures at length he came to Battel and gave one their and their was a gret number of peopel came to hear him and I went he had verrey long conversation concerning the state of the country and tilling them that they was verry much impose upon and he said he would show them the way to gain their rights and liberals [liberties] and he said it would be verry Proper for every man to keep gun in his house espesely young men and that they might

The animus of the clergy was especially shewn toward Mr. Cobbett, on account of his attacks on the tithes: which he continued to maintain were (originally) in part intended for the use of the poor. The "gross and unwarrantable attack" alluded to by Mr. Trevor, was the showing-up of a Suffolk parson; who had made an infamous and lying attack upon Cobbett. Now, some of the more sensible parsons were endeavouring to meet the sad necessities of the day; one worthy Norfolk clergyman, for example, on being petitioned for a reduction of his tithes, sent answer that he "should be satisfied with whatever they might send him." But the fat pluralists, and the numerous lazy class of that day, were too blind with selfish rage to listen to any reason. The present sufferer from Cobbett's lash was one of these.[2]

prepare themselves in readiness to go with him when he called on them and he would show them which way to go on and he said that peopel might expect firs their as well as others places. This is the truth and nothing But the truth of A deying man."

[2] "An Address to those whom it may concern, but principally the Poor, containing an Account of the late Trials and Executions which have taken place, with a Brief Statement of the Causes that, directly or indirectly, occasioned those Acts of Insubordination which have disgraced the Annals of our Country. By the Rev. Charles Day, LL.B." (Ipswich, 1831.) This was intended as an "antidote" to the writings of men who had "no regard for *you*, they want *rebellion*," &c., &c. Here is a bit of Mr. Day's logic:—"Cobbett positively asserts that he everywhere did his best to put a stop to the fires, &c.; he nevertheless informs us that he did exhort the farmers to call the people together in their several parishes, to explain the matter to them, and to call upon them all to join in a petition to Parliament for a reduction of taxes and tithes! Now,

So, with idle shepherds cursing, and newspapers inventing new calumnies, the Government thought they had a case; and an indictment was preferred against Mr. Cobbett, for "a libel, with the intent to raise discontent in the minds of the labourers in husbandry, and to incite them to acts of violence, and to destroy corn-stacks, machinery, and other property." After some delays, the affair was at last heard in the Court of King's Bench, on the 7th July, 1831; Lord Tenterden being judge on the occasion, and Sir Thomas Denman, as Attorney-General, conducting the prosecution. The principal Cabinet Ministers were on the bench, (having been subpœnaed by the defendant); as also was his old friend, the Earl of Radnor, who had voluntarily determined to give Cobbett an opportunity of calling him as a witness, if he chose. The defendant appeared in person.

From beginning to end of this trial, it was a manifest error. Denman began with the ridiculous statement that "he understood" that the defendant had "entered the court at the head of a large number of persons whom he had called together by notice;" and proceeded to exhort the jury "to

who is there, even among the poor, that cannot see what all this means? It amounts to this: let the employer make common cause with the employed, and go hand in hand in denouncing the Government of the country, and the clergy of the Church of England, and this will be quite as revolutionary as any Republican can wish: down with the Constitution! down with the Church!"

yield to nothing like menace or intimidation, which conduct so improper is calculated and probably intended in some degree to produce." And his whole speech was one long, groundless imputation, unsupported by a shred of evidence; and based on the fact (which nobody denied, for it was indisputable) which the defendant had clearly pointed out: the close connexion between the reckless conduct of the labourers, on the one hand, and the cause of that conduct; and its results (such as the cheapening of food, and the sudden reduction of the tithes) on the other.

The "extract" from the offending number of the *Register*, which formed the basis of the indictment, did not include those parts of the essay, which said that the acts of the labourers were unlawful; which quoted the current newspaper stories about the Suffolk clergy who could not get in their tithes: which reminded the Whigs how their praises had been derived from yet-unfulfilled promises: which hit at the newspapers and the borough-mongers; which quoted Bacon and Blackstone; which advocated honesty and freedom of election; which proclaimed, "I am for a Government of King, Lords, and Commons; but, let what else will come, I am for the freedom, the happiness and greatness of England; and, above all things, for the good feeding and clothing of those who raise all the food, and make all the clothing!" No: these would have

been the remainder of his argument, and would have enabled a jury not only to understand its whole drift and tenour, but to pronounce the writer a truly wise and patriotic man.

Some of the jury did, evidently, consider the matter a gross absurdity; for, being locked up all night, the twelve were unable to agree to a verdict, and they were forthwith discharged.[3]

Mr. Cobbett's long speech, in his defence, must have made some of his audience feel grievously uncomfortable. No one was spared; not a soul, whose delinquencies could possibly illustrate the case. There were the Cabinet Ministers sitting in a row before him (including the Chancellor, Brougham), being scolded for their perfidy toward the people; there was the Attorney-General himself, whose promotion in his profession had actually been retarded, on account of his firm adherence to the Whig cause — now prosecuting the press with greater zeal than his Tory predecessor; there were

[3] An intimate friend of Mr. Cobbett's, still living, has furnished the writer of these pages with some reminiscences of this affair. Mr. Seeley, the well-known bookseller, a bitter opponent of Cobbett's, was on the jury; but the foreman, a Mr. Wilkinson, was a vigorous Cobbettite; and these two led the parties in the struggle. Cobbett begged his friend to attend him in court, for then "he should have confidence." As a matter of fact, Denman's insinuation about a mob was utterly baseless, for Cobbett only had two or three friends with him. The people waited in court all night, and the cheering and uproar were tremendous when the result was announced.

the magistrates who had extorted or invented Goodman's confession ; and there were the party newspapers, with their transparent falsehoods, weathercock principles, and questionable motives: all scolded anew. All who had contributed, in any degree, to the climax which ended in this trial, were covered with deserved ridicule.

The speech occupied several hours, and it would take nearly fifty of our pages to reproduce it. The points relied on for the defence were, that the indictment contained only garbled extracts from an article which had, as a whole, the exact opposite of the tendency imputed to it ; that the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge (of which society Brougham and Denman were both leading members !) had recently asked Cobbett's permission to reprint his celebrated Letter to the Luddites against machine-breaking and other violence, with the same objects in view that he had himself ; that Mr. Goodman, labourer and incendiary, had been pardoned, or had unaccountably disappeared, since his "confession," and that there was a letter (which Cobbett produced, and read) written by Goodman himself, totally different in style and spelling ; that the *Times* newspaper had recently libelled the judges, and called the close-borough members "the hired lacqueys of public delinquents," and yet was unmolested as long as it continued to puff the Ministry ; that a declaration from the tradesmen

and labourers in and around Battle (who had heard Cobbett's lectures), made it clear that the persons who had produced the three confessions were . . . . . No, Mr. Cobbett did not apply to their conduct the terms that it deserved, but contented himself with reading the declaration; and, the notorious fact that he had spent the best part of his life in the endeavour to instruct the labouring classes, in the arts of happiness and goodness.

The speech of the defendant was occasionally interrupted by applause; and once by the judge, on the score of irrelevancy; an objection, however, which was not sustained. And a stray joke or two shone out, as when Cobbett spoke of Mr. Gurney (junior counsel) as "a mere truffle-hunter; he neither sees nor smells anything but the immediate object of his search," in allusion to his special search of the *Register* for indictable matter; or in his sarcastic reference to the "open, fair, and candid," professions of the Attorney-General, which he said were traceable not to the wig on his head, but to the whig in his heart; and in such a passage as this, his humour would prevail:—

"Such are the odious and foul calumnies which have been heaped upon me, that I dare say you expected to see me hoofed and horned, a pair of horns on my head and hoofs up to my knees, terminating with a cloven foot."

Upon the whole, this speech was a wonderful

performance for a man in his seventieth year. Mr. Cobbett had far too often relied upon his own powers in legal defence; yet his failures as an advocate were failures which any member of the bar might have been proud of. And, in the present case, the charge of sedition was so utterly base and trumpery, that the cause of the prosecution really gave power to his own, by furnishing him with a handle for the bitterest expressions of contempt. He certainly lashed into the Whigs most unmercifully, from time to time; as opportunity brought them again to his mind. For example:—

"The noble marquis (Blandford) informed me in a letter, that it had been currently reported in the House of Commons and the Club Houses, that I had been connected with some of the fires and had run away! Run away, indeed! Who was I to run from? What! I run from the Greys, the Lambs, the Russells, and the Broughams? I! Gentlemen, contempt comes to my aid, or I should suffocate with indignation at the thought! No, I have not run away; that base faction has brought me here, and I thank them for it; because it enables me to clear myself from the false and scandalous calumnies which they have been circulating against me."

And, having reviewed the whole charge, and its collaterals, Mr. Cobbett wound up his address as follows—in terms which form a strikingly truthful sketch, not only of the position in which he then

stood, but of the position which he occupies (with all his faults) in the hearts and minds of his fellow-countrymen—a brave, earnest, upright, and patriotic man.

"The fact is, that I am the watchman, the man on the tower, who can be neither coaxed, nor wheedled, nor bullied; and I have expressed my determination never to quit my post until I obtain a cheap government for the country, and by doing away with places and pensions, prevent the people's pockets from being picked. These men know that if I were to get into the House of Commons under a reformed parliament, I should speedily effect that object, and therefore they are resolved to get rid of me by some means or other; but, thank God, gentlemen, you will not let them effect it on the present occasion.

"I have little else to add, except to state what evidence I shall lay before you. The first witness I shall call will be the Lord Chancellor, and I will put in the letter to the Luddites, and which by delivery to Lord Brougham for publication, I, in point of law, republished at the very time when I was said to be endeavouring to stir up the labourers to sedition and outrage. I will then call his Lordship to prove the fact respecting the application for it, and he will tell you that I stipulated no terms, but that the whole of the letter should be published. I shall then call the Earl of Radnor, who knows me and all my sentiments well, and he will tell you whether I am a likely man to design and endeavour to do that which this 'false, scandalous, and malicious' Whig indictment charges me with wishing to do. I shall also call several persons of the highest respectability from Kent, Sussex,

and other parts of the country, to prove that I have not done anything to stir up disturbance, but that I have done a great deal to prevent it and to restore quiet. I shall then call Lord Melbourne to prove that the sentence on Goodman was not executed, but that he was sent out of the country, whereas Cook was put to death. When the jury shall have heard all this, and shall have read over the various publications, I have not the slightest doubt but that they will dismiss with scorn and contempt this groundless charge of the Whig Attorney-General. This is the second time in my life that I have been prosecuted by an Attorney-General, and brought before this court. I have been writing for thirty years, and only twice out of that long period have I been brought before this court. The first time was by an apostate Whig. What, indeed, of evil have the Whigs not done? Since then, although there have been six Attorneys-General, all Tories, and although, were I a crown lawyer, I might pick out plenty of libels from my writings, if this be a libel, yet I have never for twenty-one years been prosecuted until this Whig government came in. But the Whigs were always a most tyrannical faction; they always tried to make tyranny double tyranny; they were always the most severe, the most grasping, the most greedy, the most tyrannical faction whose proceedings are recorded in history. It was they who seized what remained of the Crown lands; it was they who took to themselves the last portion of Church property; it was they who passed the monstrous Riot Act; it was they also who passed the Septennial Bill. The Government are now acquiring great credit for doing away with the rotten boroughs; but if they deserve credit for doing them away, let it be borne in mind that the Whigs

created them. They established an interest in the regulation, and gave consistency and value to corruption. Then came the excise laws, which were brought in by the Whigs; and from them, too, emanated that offensive statute by which Irish men and Irish women may be transported without judge or jury. There is, indeed, no faction so severe and cruel; they do everything by force and violence: the Whigs are the Rehoboam of England; the Tories ruled us with rods, but the Whigs scourge us with scorpions!

The last time I was brought before this court, I was sent out of it to two years' imprisonment among felons, and was condemned to pay, at the expiration of the two years, a fine of 1000*l.* to the King, which the King took and kept. But this was not all; I was bound, too, in a penalty of 5000*l.* myself, and obliged to procure two sureties in 2500*l.* each, to keep the peace for seven years. . . . I was carried seventy miles from my family, and shut up in a jail, doubtless with the hope that I should expire from stench and mortification of mind. It pleased God, however, to bless me with health, and, though deprived of liberty, by dint of sobriety and temperance, I outlived the base attempt to destroy me. What crime had I committed? For what was it that I was condemned to this horrible punishment? Simply for writing a paragraph in which I expressed the indignation I felt at an English local militiaman having been flogged under a guard of German bayonets! I only expressed the indignation I felt, and I should have been a base creature indeed, if I had not expressed it. But now, military flogging excites universal indignation. If there be at present any of the jury alive who found me guilty and sentenced me to that punishment, what remorse must

they not feel for their conduct when they perceive that every writer in every periodical of the present day, even including the favourite publication of the Whig Attorney-General, are now unanimous in deprecating the system of military flogging altogether! Yes, for expressing my disapprobation of that system, I was tossed into a dungeon like Daniel into the lions' den. But why am I now tossed down before this court by the Attorney-General? What are my sins? I have called on the Government to respect the law; I have cautioned them that hard-hearted proceedings are driving the labourers to despair; that is my crime. If the Government really wish to avoid disturbances in the country, let them give us back the old laws; let them give the people the old game law, and repeal the new law; and let them do away with the other grinding laws that oppress the poor. I have read with horror which I cannot describe, of a magistrate being accused to the Lord Chancellor of subornation of perjury; I have read of that magistrate being reinstated, and I have shuddered with horror at supposing that a poor starving labourer may be brought before such a man, and in conjunction with another such magistrate, may be doomed to seven years' transportation for being out at night, and such a magistrate may be himself a game-preserver! This is a monstrous power, and certainly ought to be abolished. The ministry, however, will perhaps adopt the measures I have recommended, and then prosecute me for recommending them. Just so it is with parliamentary reform, a measure which I have been foremost in recommending for twenty years. I have pointed out and insisted upon, the sort of reform that we must have; and they are compelled already to adopt a large

part of my suggestions, and avowedly against their will. They hate me for this; they look upon it as I do, that they are married to Reform, and that I am the man who has furnished the halter in which they are led to church. For supplying that halter they have made this attack on me through the Attorney-General, and will slay me if they can. The Whigs know that my intention was not bad. This is a mere pretence to inflict pecuniary ruin on me, or cause me to die of sickness in a jail; so that they may get rid of me, because they can neither buy nor silence me. It is their fears which make them attack me, and it is my death they intend. In that object they will be defeated; for, thank heaven, you stand between me and destruction. If, however, your verdict should be—which I do not anticipate—one that will consign me to death, by sending me to a loathsome dungeon, I will with my last breath pray to God to bless my country and curse the Whigs; and I bequeath my revenge to my children and the labourers of England."

The result of this trial was hailed with great satisfaction by nearly all the newspapers. And the chief significance of the episode lies in this: that from that month of July, 1831, the press of this kingdom has been free from political persecution. There can be no doubt whatever, that this trial settled the question as to whether the press was to be gagged or not. The newspapers were good enough to admit so much.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"I NOW BELONG TO THE PEOPLE OF OLDHAM."

THE progress of the Reform Bill is the foremost topic of the day; and the near prospect of Mr. Cobbett's election, by some popular constituency, is now more obvious.[1] In the course of September, 1831, there appears his first address to the electors of Manchester, in response to an invitation conveyed to him from a committee formed with the object of endeavouring to secure his return.

The objects which Cobbett now professed to have in view were considerably in advance of those of some years previously; and their publication, in this address, shows distinctly the rapid growth of opinion amongst the mass of the people. Not only the abolition of sinecures, and of all pensions the merit of which could not be readily granted; abolition of tithes; reduction of the standing army;

[1] According to a private letter, addressed to his friend Thomas Mellersh of Godalming, there were proposals to elect him at Manchester, at Glasgow, at Oldham, at Preston, and at Dudley.

and an equitable adjustment of the currency, were recapitulated, as reforms urgently called for; but he now declared that the National Debt ought to be wiped out, by the sale of ecclesiastical estates, the misapplied portion of the property of corporate bodies, and all the Crown lands; and so to reduce taxation, and the cost of its collection, as to give some hopes of greater prosperity and happiness to "this industrious nation."

Of course, these things were "revolutionary" for that age. Every great change is revolutionary; but the bad odour attaching to an epithet, in some minds, is no index to the value of the ideas represented. Important changes in the mode of government, particularly as to a greatly-lessened waste of public money, naturally appeared monstrous and wicked to the governing classes, and to their adherents; at a period when bishops died worth half-a-million. And it came just as naturally to the minds of the reformers, the longer the question was delayed, that, by whatever name their proposals might be designated, there could be nothing so monstrous and wicked as to persist in a system which made the rich richer and the poor poorer.

The events of the past fifteen years had made a wonderful difference in the minds of the labouring classes. The power of a cheap serial, first exemplified in the publication of Cobbett's twopenny *Register*, had become fully recognized. The *Penny Maga-*

zine, Chambers' Edinburgh Journal, and similar publications were now beginning their respective careers with astonishing success; along with a host of political sheets. A new sort of education was spreading: that sort of education which made men think for themselves; and, for the first time in history, the "lower orders" were beginning to take an interest in the affairs of other nations beside their own. Well might statesmen be affrighted at the progress of revolution in France and Belgium, and at the growing importance of the American Republic! The knowledge of political good and evil, fresh from those democratic sources, might well alarm them; for it was sinking deep into minds, the fertility of which had been produced by their own haughty failures.

So Mr. Cobbett's address to the electors of Manchester was denounced as utterly subversive of the institutions of the country. However, he went down to Manchester in the course of the winter, and delivered several lectures, with the object of showing that his principles, on the contrary, would tend to conserve, instead of destroy. Lord Radnor had previously written a letter to one of the Manchester papers[2] warmly supporting him,

[2] "With respect to the measures which ought to be adopted, I have no hesitation in saying that my decided opinion is that, for the safety of the State, the eternal peace of the country, the well-being of the people, the preservation of property, and the maintenance of anything like liberty, measures must be adopted to the full extent of

and offering his aid, in case of a subscription being made. And Cobbett now found, upon visiting Manchester, that he had already won his way into the hearts and minds of the people there. Before he left, a dinner was given in his honour, at which Mr. John Fielden, manufacturer, of Todmorden, presided.

The following will give an example of his general reception in Lancashire. Most of Cobbett's "egotism" was displayed in answer to personal attacks, and we owe a good deal of biographical matter to those occasions on which he chose to answer. One evening in the House of Lords, the Earl of Falmouth, in passing a sneer over to Lord Radnor, concerning the latter's nomination-borough of Downton, insinuated that the loss of that borough would be "a bad thing for Cobbett, whom the people would scarcely elect, if left to themselves." Lord Falmouth had a taste of

any that have ever as far as I recollect) been proposed by Mr. Cobbett. I am persuaded that he has all these objects sincerely at heart. I wholly acquit him of any personal ambition, except probably that anxious desire for fame, and that wish to live in the grateful recollection of his countrymen, which are the signs of an exalted and of a noble spirit. Sordid views of interest he certainly has none—no petty ambition. The good of the people is what he seeks; his fame—the mere fact of his being thought of to represent Manchester—is the assurance that he has the means of promoting it."

This extract is of no mean value, as testimony from a man who had known him personally for thirty years. The Committee at once printed the letter in broadside.

Mr. Cobbett's lash, as a reward for his temerity; and Cobbett concluded his paper thus:—

"I have been lecturing on politics—I have been maintaining my *Manchester propositions*, in every great town in the north, as far as the northern confines of Yorkshire, with the exception, I believe, of Liverpool and Bradford; and I have everywhere maintained that, unless those propositions be acted upon to the full extent, a reform of the Parliament will be a delusion and a mockery. Everywhere I have been received with every mark of approbation. . . . . Two or three words with my name, written by myself, have been begged as a valuable present by more than a hundred persons. No mark of disapprobation have I received during the whole of half-a-hundred lectures that I have given. . . . . The people of England will have the sense to perceive that it is not title and fortune that they want to represent them; but talent, knowledge, and courage; a love of the honour of their country; men who see in every labourer their countryman, and who take to themselves a share of the disgrace of seeing him robbed of the fruit of his toil. Experience has now taught the people of England that, to be restored to their liberties and happiness, they must rely upon one another; and though you do not know it, the country everywhere teems with clever and well-educated young men. During my last tour, scores—and I might say many hundreds of young men, sometimes twenty at a time—have crowded round me as I have been going out of the lecturing-places; one saying, as he shook my hand, 'That is the hand that wrote the "Grammar;"' another, 'That is the hand that wrote the "Protestant

Reformation;"' another, 'That is the hand that wrote the "Advice to Young Men."' This was the case, more or less, at every place where I was. . . . . Nor was this confined to the buoyant spirits of Lancashire and Yorkshire, where the heart seems always upon the lips; but I found it the same everywhere."

The month of June saw the triumph of the Parliamentary Reformers, and eager preparations were made for canvass. Expectation ran high: the newly-enfranchised took the matter into their own hands; and amongst these were the people of Lancashire. Manchester had sent a member to Parliament in some long past age, but had been for centuries unrepresented, and was now to have two members. Oldham, with a population of over 50,000, was, likewise, to elect two.

Early in July, 1832, Mr. Cobbett received a letter from an Oldham friend, informing him that it was determined to put him in nomination; and that two strangers having unexpectedly commenced a canvass, his friends had at once announced his name, along with that of Mr. John Fielden; the latter having consented to the proposal, with the understanding that Cobbett should be his colleague, if not elected for some other place. Several other constituencies had been thought of; but this unmistakable earnestness on the part of Lancashire decided the matter; and when, in the course of December, the elections came off, Fielden and

Cobbett were at the top of the poll for Oldham. The people of Manchester had also put Mr. Cobbett in nomination, but, the result of the contest at Oldham being made known there on the first day of the poll, the votes intended for him were transferred to other candidates.

Meanwhile, another lecturing tour had been undertaken during the autumn, extending into Scotland; and, if one may judge from the reception he met with, Mr. Cobbett was now enjoying greater popularity than at any other period of his life.[1]

[1] Tait's *Edinburgh Magazine* (Nov. 1832) describes Cobbett's reception in Edinburgh in very generous terms, declaring that Pasta, Paganini, nor Fanny Kemble created half such sensation. "He presented himself before an impatient house, filled from floor to ceiling, which rose to greet him in a tumultuous rapture. His appearance is highly favourable; his ease, tact, and self-possession are unrivaled. He was neither overpowered nor taken by surprise with these demonstrations of the modern Athenians."

"Mr. Cobbett is still of stately stature, and must in youth have been tall. He must then, in physiognomy, person, and bearing, have been a fine specimen of the true Saxon breed;—

"The eyes of azure, and the locks of brown,
And the blunt speech, that bursts without a pause,
And free-born thoughts, which league the soldier with the laws."

. . . . . His thin, white hairs and high forehead, the humour lurking in the eye, and playing about the lips, betokened something more than the squire in his gala suit; still, the altogether was of this respectable and responsible kind. His voice is low-toned, clear, and flexible, and so skilfully modulated, that not an aspiration was lost of his nervous, fluent, unhesitating, and perfectly correct discourse. There was no embarrassment, no flutter, no picking of words; nor was the speaker once at fault, or in the smallest degree

The notions which Mr. Cobbett had acquired, concerning the duties belonging to the position in which he was now placed, were quite at variance with any known principles.

Until the æra of the Reformed Parliament it was accounted a preposterous thing for any member to be professedly without a party; and any one entering the House with a popular grievance at his back, as Paull and Burdett and Wardle had done in a previous generation—and as O'Connell and

disturbed, by those petty accidents and annoyances which must have moved almost any other man. . . . He is, indeed, a first-rate comic actor, possessed of that flexible, penetrative power of imitation which extends to mind and character, as well as to their outward signs. His genius is, besides, essentially dramatic. We have often read his lively characteristic dialogues with pleasure and amusement, but to see him act them, and personate Lord Althorp, pommelled and posed by the future Member for Oldham, was a degree beyond this. He was in nothing vehement or obstreperous, though everybody had anticipated something of this kind; and his subdued tone and excellent discretion gave double point to his best hits. . . . . The humour of his solemn irony, his blistering sarcasm, but especially his sly hits and unexpected or random strokes and pokes on the sore or weak sides of the Whigs, told with full effect. To oratory, in the highest sense of the term, Mr. Cobbett never once rises, but he is ever a wily, clear, and most effective speaker."

"Mr. Cobbett expressed himself highly gratified with his reception in Edinburgh. In Glasgow, and other parts of the country, he has been, if that were possible, still more popular. And at this we rejoice, as evidence of affection for the cause to which, whatever fastidious persons may think, Cobbett has been a useful, rough pioneer, and most powerful auxiliary."

The Rev. George Gilfillan gives ("Gallery of Literary Portraits,' 2nd Ser.) an animated account of Cobbett's appearance in Edinburgh, and is very fair, albeit shrewd enough, in his entire estimate of Cobbett's character.

Hume in recent times—to a great extent stood alone. They might get supporters from time to time; but such men were not of the sort which could coalesce with the patrician nominees and the plutocrats, who had hitherto pretended to represent the Commons of England.

Had Mr. Cobbett entered Parliament a quarter of a century previously, when it was within his power to do so through aristocratic influence, he would have been the means of forming a party earnestly devoted to the objects of Reform; and it must be regarded as a serious error on his part, arising though it did from a sturdy regard for his own independence, that he should refuse to do so; and expect to sway the House of Commons, in the smallest degree, from the outside. For it was looked upon, in those days, as something bordering on the seditious, for any one outside the walls of Parliament to pretend to discuss domestic politics; and an affectation of contempt was the only answer to the cleverest and most liberal of amateur statesmanship. As for earnestness, in the consideration of any popular question, it was not there at all; the House of Commons of 1831-2 would never have passed a Reform Bill, only that the clamour of the Unrepresented made the question vital to the existence of the Whig party; and the fiercest opponents to the popular candidates, at the elections which followed, were the minis-

terialists themselves. To the very last the spectacle was seen of the exclusive classes clinging to what they deemed a prescriptive right to govern.

Such men, then, as Cobbett, and Silk Buckingham, and Roebuck, coming into Parliament for the first time, found themselves there under circumstances favourable only for the exercise of particular individuality; and, unless the possessor of special talents, the event proved that the individual influence of each was very small. The old members would not even listen to them; and the general feeling concerning the new men was that they were astonishingly harmless.

The opening scene has been often enough described. "Some very bad characters have been returned," says Mr. Greville.[4] Among these "bad characters" is placed the new member for Oldham; who at once establishes his claim to such epithet, by seating himself on the front bench (usually occupied by ministers), and by commencing his first speech with these words:—

"It appears to me, that, since I have been sitting here, I have heard a great deal of vain and unprofitable conversation."

But, really, there was nothing to be frightened at. Excepting that Mr. Cobbett seemed to think that a Reformer should be chosen Speaker of a Re-

[4] "Memoirs," ii. 335.

formed Parliament, and that some disregard might be paid to the established rules of the House, there was nothing whatever to reward the expectations of those who had trembled at the bare thought of this "diabolical villain" treading the floor of that sacred chamber. There sat, night after night, one of the meekest, most inoffensive of men. When he got up to speak, there stood a fine, tall, hale old fellow, with a face sparkling with humour, and a voice of surprising gentleness; only roused to vehemence when the efforts to cough him down were somewhat too overpowering.

Cobbett's short career in Parliament has, sometimes, been stigmatized as a failure. It was not a failure. He was a very regular attendant while his health lasted; and he never lost an opportunity of reminding the House what he had been sent there for. And the numerous interruptions and contradictions to which he at first became subject, rather manifested "failure" elsewhere: viz. on the part of many members to understand the awful exigencies of the time, and the responsibility which they ought to have attached to their own position. But their sensibilities were far too keen, to bear with patience Mr. Cobbett's frequent references to the burdens under which the people still laboured; one member, at last, expressing an opinion that "the constant complaints respecting the distresses of the people were of the most injurious tendency:

they were calculated to make all classes politicians"! In short, the first reformed Parliament was, itself, a great failure; and was rightly sent back to the country at the end of two unproductive sessions.

It must be said, however, that the first two or three months of Mr. Cobbett's attendance in Parliament were not calculated to impress the House in his favour. Although he put up with malicious references to Tom Paine, and to agricultural incendiarism, with remarkable good temper, there was an amount of indiscretion about his mode of bringing up his own special topics, which mightily offended the taste of less self-assertive people. And, upon one occasion, his mode of procedure was so absurd, that he covered both himself and his cause with overwhelming contempt. The circumstances were these :—

A number of gentlemen, led by Mr. Attwood, the member for Birmingham, conceived it to be only just and proper that an inquiry should be made into the state of the country, and the prevailing distress.[5] Lord Althorp considered any such inquiry unadvisable, "because it might lead to an investigation of the consequences produced by the changes in the currency;"—he was willing to consider the subject when it came fairly before the House, but objected to the proposed mode

[5] *Vide* the *Courier* newspaper, March, 1833.

of entertaining it. The motion was lost, by a narrow majority; and it was renewed, about a month afterwards, in another form, only to fail again. Thus, the Whig ministry set their faces against the very Reformers which they had themselves called up.

But Mr. Cobbett wants, above all things, the very thing that Lord Althorp deprecates: "an investigation of the consequences produced by the changes in the currency," and he is resolved to have it, one way or another. And he can think of no surer means than that of fixing the *onus* of the public distresses upon the author of those changes in the currency, which he had always considered to be a leading cause of the distress.

Sir Robert Peel was, at this time, leader of the opposition, and the most distinguished man on the Tory side,—admired alike by friend and foe. The hopes of the Tory party were centred in Peel, for no man who had pretended to lead them, since the days of Pitt, could boast a tenth part of the talents which he possessed. His first important part in public affairs had been the carrying through Parliament, in 1819, the bill for the resumption of cash payments; a measure which Mr. Cobbett had treated with ridicule, as one certain to be productive of prolonged disaster to the country. Cobbett's predictions were, to a great extent, verified by events; and he considered himself, thenceforward, an

authority upon that abstruse topic. And he now brought forward a resolution, to the effect that Peel's "want of knowledge," displayed in his repeated failures to adjust the currency, since the year 1819, merited his ignominious dismissal from the Privy Council.

No scheme could have been invented, better than this, in order to show Cobbett's headstrong ineptitude on certain occasions. To go no farther, —the inconsistency of protesting that there was no imputation on Peel's honour, while proposing what would have been (for him) the very deepest disgrace, was typical of much that explains Cobbett's frequent failure to impress men of cultivation and refinement; and he gave, in this instance, a signal example of his neglect to consider the fitness of things. Most of what he said was perfectly true, and could not be answered, and was not answered; but the outrageous method of bringing the question forward not only spoilt it all, but brought down upon his head deserved derision. Fielden, and Attwood, and three others, manfully supported him; while the rest laughed and jeered, to their heart's content.

It was nearly a month after this episode, before Cobbett's voice was again heard. At length, however, he seems to have learned the temper of the House; and we soon find him thanking "hon. members for the attention with which, &c." He

generally had something to say upon any topic connected with taxation and the well-being of the people, and on several occasions delivered long and effective speeches; as on the Poor Laws, suppression of disturbances in Ireland, and the proposed Factory regulations. On this last question Mr. Fielden was in the front rank as an agitator; and was intensely gratified with the support of his colleague, especially when Cobbett, speaking of the factory children, alluded to "three hundred thousand of the most helpless creatures in the world holding up their hands for mercy." And one matter appears on the journals of the House, upon Mr. Cobbett's motion, which resulted in a Select Committee.[6]

In the spring of the following year, ominous signs appeared, which proved that the change in his habits, necessitated by his parliamentary attendance, was telling upon Cobbett's vigorous constitution; and he was absent from his post for two whole months. The period which elapsed after the dissolution, and before the meeting of the new Parliament in 1835, was not sufficient for

[6] It appeared, from a petition presented to the House of Commons by Mr. Cobbett, that a policeman, one William Popay, had been acting the part of an amateur spy, by joining several political unions of the time, and had even urged their members to the adoption of violent courses. This discovery, and the debate thereon, produced great excitement at the time; and Popay was, in consequence of the report of the Committee, dismissed from the police force.

thorough restoration to health, and he resumed his duties with a bad cough clinging to him. On the 10th of March, he attempted to speak upon the motion of the Marquess of Chandos to abolish the malt-tax; but he found his voice so hoarse, that he could not make the gentlemen immediately in front hear him; and was obliged to sit down. He still valiantly attended, however, and spoke on several occasions; the last being on the 25th May, in a discussion on agricultural distress.

But his time was come: his place in the House of Commons knew him no more; and, when the House assembled on the evening of the 19th June, a whisper circulated upon the benches to the effect that the member for Oldham was dead.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"I HAVE BEEN THE GREAT ENLIGHTENER OF THE PEOPLE OF ENGLAND."[1]

So this long fight was over.

For forty years past, Cobbett had waged incessant warfare against political hypocrisy and corruption; here represented by revolutionary theorists; there by political adventures; now, by venal courtiers; again, by uncompromising partisanship in the press. Heedless of personal danger, and proud of his native soil and of his fellow-countrymen, he had never flinched from the pursuit of those

[1] "Cobbett was not only an example of self-instruction, but of public teaching. He said, on some occasion, many years ago, "It is certain that I have been the great enlightener of the people of England;" and so he was. The newspapers have not, that we are aware, adverted to our deepest obligation to him. He was the inventor of Twopenny Trash. Let the title be inscribed on his monument. The infamous Six Acts, although they suspended the machinery for awhile, of cheap political publications, could not undo what had been done, nor avert its great immediate, and far greater eventual utility. If only for that good work, honoured be the memory of old Cobbett."—(Mr. W. J. Fox, in the *Monthly Repository*, for 1835, p. 487.)

whom he regarded as the enemies of his country's welfare. Often blindly passionate, but always honest, and dominated by the convictions of the hour, he had presented the unexampled phenomenon of a man who could face, single-handed, the world in arms; insusceptible alike to the arts of intrigue, and to the cozening of partisanship.

The character of the London newspaper press, in the earlier years of the present century, bears no comparison with its now-existing posterity, either in character, ability, or influence. Our leading journal, indeed, should scarcely know its own grandfather: appealing, as it does, to the taste of the most highly-cultivated minds of the age; and quite indifferent to anything but the task of representing the best public opinion of the day. As for a "government organ," there is no such thing; your newspaper now gets upon the wings of the day, or what it supposes the wings of the day, and there catches the best breeze that it can. There is no space for mutual recriminations, with ostentation of "private wire," and elaborate political and literary reviews, if even the taste for dirt-throwing had not vanished. The doctrine of the survival of the fittest is found to hold good, in journalism as in everything else; and there cannot, possibly, be any better token of the improvement of the age, in taste and morals, than the elevated tone of the more successful leaders of public opinion in our own days.

When the History of the newspaper-press comes to be properly written, it will not be a mere record of the struggles and strifes of proprietors; the successes of the few, and the failures of the many; nor even the extraordinary wealth of anecdote furnished by personal history. Along with these matters will have to be introduced critical studies, derived from close examination of the journals; discovering the amount of prescience with which each may be credited, and the growth and decay of their influence; tracing motives of particular partisanship to their source; and estimating their relative places, in the grand temple of the Fourth Estate.

The task of that historian will find its best reward, in the endeavour to comprehend the first quarter of the nineteenth century. He will see the press first enslaved, then reckless, then persecuted; then partially enslaved again; then gradually presenting a prospect that it will, one day or other, become purified into something like dignity and respectability. For all this long while, it has been strangely unable to endure rivalry and opposition; and its members have vied with one another, as to which could employ the foulest epithets, impute the wickedest motives to opponents, or fawn the most gracefully upon "patrons." There was no place for independence, in those days; for independent principles were considered to hide the wolf of Jacobinism. The alteration in tone, consequent upon a change

of proprietorship, went under the favourite stigma of "profligacy."[2] As for party-spirit, there never was a truer dictum than that laid down by Mr. Cobbett, in one of the later numbers of the London *Porcupine*: "The press is as much shackled and restrained by the spirit of party, as it could be by the most restrictive laws."

From the day of the first appearance of the *Political Register*, a new æra dawned for journalism. Its originality in plan, and the power with which it was written, awakened envy; its plain English, and rapid acquisition of independence in opinion, provoked opposition. And the success, with which its early career was marked, brought imitators into the field. But that which soon characterized it, more particularly, was an inflexible hostility to such newspapers, and such persons, who endeavoured to extenuate or explain away the misuse of public money. People sadly wanted educating upon this point. The principles of Walpole and Newcastle had borne fruit. The Treasury was surrounded by hungry adventurers; and there were hundreds of men, as late as William Pitt's time, who had sucked-in these principles, as it were, with their mothers' milk. And if we consider that,

[2] *Profligate*, by the way, is difficult to define, as a word much used by the Bowleses and the Giffords and the other Anti-Jacobins. It may be safely recommended, as a preliminary study, to the coming historian. *Scurrilous* is another word, which would appear to mean *beating your opponent hollow.*

when Cobbett began the fight, and for some time after, there was no one else had the courage, or was in the mind, to expose it all, we shall understand the singular position in which he stood. For an anonymous writer to sit down, and write off a malicious paragraph or two with insinuations of venality, was one thing; but, for a man, well-known in the flesh, renouncing the editorial "we," and affecting the first-person-singular, proceeding to tell a plain story, fearless of the consequences, was a phenomenon which startled Society; the effect produced being similar to that which occurs upon poking your walking-stick into an ants' nest.

Decent Society never forgave Mr. Cobbett. No matter! Upon that man's memory lies the credit of having been chiefly instrumental in restoring political purity to the nation. The whole domestic history of England, between 1800 and 1835, is distinguished by the struggles of the nation to emancipate itself from corruption in Church and State. The pioneer was William Cobbett; and no history of those struggles, which does not place him high among the "leaders and guiders" of men, will be worthy of the name.

As to how far Mr. Cobbett's ideas and predictions have been accepted, is not the purpose of the present work; if, even, its limits did not forbid such an essay. It is certain that he was largely pirated, during his lifetime, both in speeches and in news-

paper articles. But he lost so much weight, in the minds of dispassionate men, by such unbounded extravagance as was displayed in his "History of the Reformation;" and his cotemporaries were so cruelly lashed and scolded, when the advocacy of their own views exceeded the truth, that the significance of his career could not be properly understood by his generation. It is almost surprising that more bad institutions did not fall before his trenchant blows; yet, with respect to those that remain,[3] and are doomed, it may safely be recommended to ransack the *Political Register* for the best arguments and illustrations, with which to defy their supporters. On many great questions Cobbett was far in advance of his time; perhaps on nothing more so than in the foresight with which he contemplated the development of popular ideas. To us, in Liberal-Conservative times, the following passage (May, 1833) seems a commonplace; but, to the privileged classes of his own days, the words were as the words of Micaiah in the ears of Ahab:—

"It is not by harshly and rudely resisting the claims of the people, that you put a stop to the progress of demo-

[3] As, for example, the Game Law. This inscrutably-absurd relic of feudalism still survives among us; although certain so-called "Liberals" boast that they ruled us for thirty years, and although this was a cry that helped to bring about the Reform Bill!

Some very pathetic articles upon this topic will be found in the *Register* during 1824, and subsequent years.

cracy. It is by yielding in time; by yielding to what is manifestly just in the people's demands; by removing expenses so clearly unjust towards the people, and so clearly unnecessary to the support of good and efficient government; it is by taking from their backs burdens which they cannot bear without ruin; and which they ought not to bear at all. It is by means like these; by doing these things, which satisfy all reasonable men, and putting them on your side; it is by these that you check, and put a stop to, the progress of democracy; and not by acts which plainly tell the people that they are to expect no redress of their grievances as long as the present order of things shall exist."

The grave was literally his last enemy. The announcement of Cobbett's death was the close of a strife, in which had been displayed the singular spectacle of the Champion of the Press arrayed against its own licentiousness; in which the dangers attendant upon the conjuring up of new foes had been counted as nothing, while there was a principle to be maintained, or a touch of cant to be exposed. And, now that he was gone for ever, the whole fraternity acknowledged his genius and his talents; and confessed that a good, and great, and honest heart had departed from among them. Throughout the land, with almost unanimity, the newspapers teemed with his praises; and those were not few, who, having not long since boasted of their hatred, now frankly declared that Mr. Cobbett was a man of whom his countrymen might

justly be proud, as one of the greatest that England had ever produced.

The last years of Mr. Cobbett's domestic life were of singular tranquillity. Surrounded as he was by a family, the individual members of which had "never caused him a day's anxiety," his hearth was a complete antithesis to the stormy scenes outside. And he had that felicity, the first wish of every good man's heart, of seeing his sons and daughters bear the fruits of his own example, in a correct estimate of the duties and the discipline of life. Not only that. Age never came upon him in crabbed form. There was a soft, genial nature about Mr. Cobbett, which no surface vehemence could exorcise. Even, when dealing his heaviest blows upon the heads of the poor "borough-mongers," or when pouring his most terrible sarcasms around, his energy was the energy of warmth; as though heated with his own heart's blood. It would be difficult to find any one essay among his writings, which, fairly analyzed, did not betray honest, impetuous affection for the cause immediately on hand. You cannot fail, as you read, to recognize the unpaid advocate. That he was ridiculously vain of his success in life, is no more than could be expected of a half-educated man, who had held, for more than a generation, such extraordinary power with the lower and middle classes; but such vanity, fostered sometimes by individuals

and sometimes by the crowd, was not of that sort typified by the Napoleons and the Masaniellos of life. No: the sword laid down, and the helm removed from the brow, left this warrior a homely citizen, resting with the children, and the birds, the fruits and flowers, and the sweetest hospitalities.

So, old age brought nothing to Mr. Cobbett, of the burthen. "Always at work or sleep," the work he did at seventy years of age was not excelled in quality by that of any previous period of his life; and, had it not been for the enforced change of habits brought about by his attendance in parliament, he might have lived another decade or so. He had, even, enured himself to noisy Fleet Street. Speaking, somewhere, of his upper room in Bolt Court, he says,—

"The birds sing better, and sing louder, and more, and stronger in a cage, than they do when at large;" adding that "the best pastorals have been written in smoky garrets." Naturally enough, if a man hath a garden in his own heart.

But, in truth, much of Cobbett's wonderful staying-power lay in his splendid mental and physical health. An active and temperate existence, in which nothing was allowed to run to waste, warded-off the approaches of senility. Excepting only a tumour which gave some trouble for a few months[4] during

[4] "For these nine months the late Mr. Cline attended me, coming to Kensington twice or thrice in every week. When I had

1824, he had known nothing of illness; beyond those trifling matters to which even the best constitutions are liable under given circumstances. After reaching his threescore-and-ten, he could still boast of riding over the country with the youngest; or doing a day's work against any one of his labourers.

This was an astonishingly active, fully-worked life; in which nothing of the morbid could possibly find entrance. An early riser, and no lingerer at meals, Cobbett never confessed to having any leisure time. Social pleasures, as such, would seem to have been almost unheeded, if not despised. Yet his hospitality was unbounded, and overflowing with good nature; and he was always at the service of persons who applied to him for advice, or, even, of those nondescript individuals who would claim the privileges of half-acquaintanceship, and call upon him to indulge a sort of curiosity.

And, of all this vigour, and heartiness, and true daily purpose, nothing failed, in the green old age of William Cobbett.

Very difficult as it is to point to a date, at which Cobbett's name will be forgotten—it is easy to understand why the popular estimate of the man, at

got well, I had got a purse of gold, and was about to give it him; but he, putting my hand away with his left, and patting me on the head with his right hand, said, "No, no! I *owe* a great deal to that head!'"

the period of his death. still holds good, in the Anglo-Saxon breast: why his character, falling so far short of perfection, is still counted worthy of the lasting honour of Englishmen. For, his faults were the faults of his race: so often virtues in disguise. Coming from the pure Saxon peasant stock, he caused a healthful infusion of fresh blood into the spirit of his age, and so brought his fellow-countrymen to see, once more, the native energy, and pugnacity, and honesty of purpose, which had so often won the battle of freedom, now brought to bear upon new conditions and new circumstances. Thus it is, that the thoughtful and unbiased student looks upon Cobbett's character and career. Full of faults, it is no incoherent jumble of a character, without principles and without light; but one having brave and high aims. A special lot in life; which must, by its very nature, bring upon the man some measure of contumely: in which a false step or two would count against him a thousandfold. A special career; pursued with a single eye, an honest purpose, and a persevering heart. A life, that needs no Apologist: but presenting a consistent story; worthy of all that has given us renown, and enabled us to dictate the principles of freedom to the whole world.

The last uneventful years of Mr. Cobbett's domestic life were spent, at least as far as the public demands upon his time would allow, among the

scenes and the occupations which he loved so well: those of his earliest recollections. The garden at Kensington becoming too small for his ambitious seed-farming experiments, the well-known manor-farm of Barn Elm was occupied for three or four years. But, in the summer of 1832, this was relinquished; and Mr. Cobbett retired farther into Surrey, to a locality not many miles from his birthplace, in the adjoining parish of Ash. Normandy farm (contiguous to that of Wanborough, whence Mr. Birkbeck had departed for the golden west) lies in a lonely, unfrequented district, with a poor, wet soil; and it was one that required a great deal of money expended upon it. But it suited Cobbett's seed-farming tastes:—

"I took a farm," he says, in his characteristic way, "for several purposes: 1. To please myself, and to live at the end of my days, in those scenes in which I began them; 2. To make the life as long as nature, unthwarted by smoke and confinement, would let it be; 3. To make a complete Tullian farm; 4. To make a Locust coppice; 5. To raise garden seeds in the best possible manner."

But nothing could ward off the perils incident to late hours in London. After his first parliamentary session, there were evident signs of his constitution failing him; and, although revived somewhat in summer, each new winter brought back a cough, which forbade rest at night, and

gradually helped to bring the end nearer. A visit to Ireland, in 1834, seemed to be undertaken with all his old powers; his writing and his humour were as good as ever. But the following winter proved to be the last, and the early months of the year 1835 were a constant struggle to keep up to the post at which he meant to die.

Not that he meant to die, yet. There were new plans, only a month before Cobbett's death, which exhibited anything but the lapse of mental or physical power. There was to be a new *Cobbett's Evening Journal*, a special feature of which was the full publication of important discussions in parliament, which were not elsewhere faithfully reported: those affairs, viz., in which Hume, and the other economists beside himself, had the leading share.

Also, the *Register* was to be dropped, "in full blaze," on his next birthday, the 9th of March, 1836:—

"Then, putting out the *Register*, at the end of the 91st volume, I shall . . . have time to write a history of MY OWN LIFE, showing the progress of a ploughboy to a seat in parliament; beginning his career by driving the rooks and magpies from his father's pea-fields and his mother's chicken-yard; and ending, by endeavouring to drive the tithe and tax devourers from the fruits of the labour of his industrious countrymen."

* * * * *

It was in the month of June, 1835, that Cobbett had his first, and last, serious illness.

He still dictated material for the *Political Register*, and continued personally to inspect his little farm, at the last by being carried in a chair. On the 16th his eldest son (writing to a friend) speaks confidently of his being in a fair way of getting strength again; and there was no very great alarm until the following day. A sudden change, however, occurred on that morning; his strength gradually wasted; and on the 18th of June, at a few minutes after one p.m., he passed away, as gently as a child would fall asleep.

APPENDIX.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL LIST OF WILLIAM COBBETT'S PUBLICATIONS.

1. THE SOLDIER'S FRIEND: or considerations on the late pretended augmentation of the subsistence of the private soldiers. "Laws grind the poor, and rich men rule the laws."—GOLDSMITH. Written by a Subaltern. London: Ridgway, 1792, 8vo. *6d.*; reprinted in 1793, without printer's or publisher's name. Price *2d.*, or 100 copies 10*s.* *6d.*, pp. 15.

[This tract is evidently the work of more than one hand. The style is that of Cobbett; but some of the subject-matter comes from a person well acquainted with the political intrigues of the day.]

2. [*Translation.*] The LAW OF NATIONS: being the science of national law, covenants, power, &c., founded upon the treaties and customs of modern nations in Europe. By G. F. von Martens, Professor of Public Law in the University of Gottingen. Translated from the French, by William Cobbett. To which is added, a list of the principal treaties, declarations, and other public papers, from the year 1731 to 1738, by the author. Philadelphia, 1794.

London edition, 1802, dedicated to John Penn, Esq. Fourth edition, London, 1829, with the treaties, &c., continued by the translator down to Nov. 1815, 8vo, pp. xxxii.—468.

3. LE TUTEUR ANGLAIS, ou Grammaire regulière de la langue anglaise, en deux parties. Par William Cobbett. A Philadelphie: chez Thomas Bradford, 1795, 8vo, pp. x.—340.

[This book has been reproduced many times in France and

Belgium, under the title of "Maitre d'Anglais," and has much increased in bulk from time to time. It is still held, in those countries, to be superior to any other book of its kind.]

4. [*Translation.*] A topographical and political description of the Spanish port of Saint Domingo, containing general observations on the climate, population, and productions; on the character and manners of the inhabitants; with an account of the several branches of the government. By M[édéric] L[ouis] E[lie] Moreau-de-Saint-Méry, Member of the Philosophical Society of Philadelphia, &c. Translated from the French by William Cobbett. Philadelphia: printed and sold by the Author, Printer, and Bookseller, No. 84, South Front Street, 1796. 2 vols. 8vo.

5. [*Appendix* only.] The HISTORY OF JACOBINISM. . . . . By William Playfair. With an Appendix by Peter Porcupine, showing the close connexion which has ever subsisted between the Jacobins at Paris and the Democrats in the United States of America. Philadelphia, 1796. 2 vols. 8vo.

6. OBSERVATIONS ON PRIESTLEY'S EMIGRATION, to which is added, A STORY OF A FARMER'S BULL. [*Anonymous.*] Philadelphia, 1794. pp. 88.

7. A BONE TO GNAW FOR THE DEMOCRATS. By Peter Porcupine. Philadelphia, Jan. 1795. pp. vi.—66.

8. A KICK FOR A BITE. By Peter Porcupine. Philadelphia, Feb. 1795.

9. A BONE TO GNAW FOR THE DEMOCRATS. Part 2. By Peter Porcupine. Philadelphia, Mar. 1795. pp. vii.—66.

Sect. 1. Observations on a patriotic pamphlet, entitled "Proceedings of the United Irishmen."

Sect. 2. Democratic principles illustrated by example.

Sect. 3. Democratic memoirs; or an account of some recent feats performed by the Frenchified citizens of the United States of America.

[London Edition of [7] and [9] printed for J. Wright, opposite Old Bond Street, Piccadilly, 1797: A Bone to Gnaw for the Democrats. By Peter Porcupine, author of the Bloody Buoy, &c., &c. To which is prefixed A Rod for the Backs

of the Critics; containing an historical sketch of the present state of political criticism in Great Britain; as exemplified in the conduct of the Monthly, Critical, and Analytical Reviews, &c., &c. Interspersed with Anecdotes. By Humphrey Hedgehog. 12mo. pp. xcv.—175.]

10. A LITTLE PLAIN ENGLISH, addressed to the people of the United States, on the Treaty, and on the conduct of the President relative thereto, in answer to "The Letters of Franklin." By Peter Porcupine. Philadelphia, August, 1795. pp. viii.—102.

11. A NEW YEAR'S GIFT TO THE DEMOCRATS; or observations on a pamphlet entitled, "A Vindication of Mr. Randolph's Resignation." Philadelphia, Jan. 1796. pp. 71.

12. The CENSOR, No. 1; or a Review of Political Occurrences relative to the United States of America. Philadelphia, Jan. 1796.

["This number of the 'Censor' was originally called 'The Prospect from the Congress Gallery;' and as such it has been sometimes referred to."—*Note in collected works.*]

13. The BLOODY BUOY, thrown out as a Warning to the Political Pilots of all Nations; or, a faithful relation of a multitude of acts of horrid barbarity, such as the eye never witnessed, the tongue expressed, or the imagination conceived, until the commencement of the French Revolution. To which is added, an instructive Essay, tracing these dreadful effects to their real causes. Philadelphia, 1796.

[Among reprints in England, there is one at Cambridge, entitled, "Annals of Blood; or an Authentic Relation," &c.]

14. The CENSOR, No. 2. Philadelphia, March, 1796.

15. The CENSOR, No. 3. Philadelphia, April, 1796.

16. The CENSOR, No. 4. Philadelphia, May, 1796.

17. The SCARE-CROW; being an infamous letter sent to Mr. John Oldden, threatening destruction to his house, and violence to the person of his tenant, William Cobbett. With remarks on the same. Philadelphia: "From the Free Press of William Cobbett, July 22, 1796."

18. The LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF PETER PORCUPINE, with a full and fair account of all his authoring transactions; being a sure and infallible guide for all enterprising young men who wish to make a fortune by writing pamphlets.—"Now you lying varlets, you shall see how a plain tale will put you down."—SHAKESPEARE. Philadelphia, Aug. 1796.

19. The CENSOR, No. 5. Philadelphia, Sept. 1796.

[Contents:—Life of Thomas Paine, interspersed with remarks and reflections. Remarks on the pamphlets lately published against Peter Porcupine.]

20. The GROS MOUSQUETON DIPLOMATIQUE; or diplomatic blunderbuss. Containing Citizen Adet's notes to the Secretary of State; as also his cockade proclamation, with a preface. Philadelphia, Oct. 1796.

[A compilation, with short preface, to pave the way for the next Censor.]

21. The CENSOR, No. 6. Philadelphia, Nov. 1796.

[Remarks on the Blunderbuss.]

22. The CENSOR, No. 7. Philadelphia, Dec. 1796.

[Contents:—Remarks on the debates in Congress.—A letter to the infamous Tom Paine, in answer to his letter to General Washington.]

3. The CENSOR, No. 8. Philadelphia, Jan. 1797.

24. PORCUPINE'S GAZETTE: daily newspaper. Philadelphia, March 4, 1797—Dec. 1799. A farewell number was issued to the subscribers, from New York, in Jan. 1800.

25. The REPUBLICAN JUDGE; or, the American liberty of the press, as exhibited, explained, and exposed, in the base and partial prosecution of William Cobbett, for a pretended libel against the King of Spain and his ambassador, before the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania. With an Address to the people of England. Philadelphia, Nov. 1797.

26. DETECTION OF A CONSPIRACY FORMED BY THE UNITED IRISHMEN, with the evident intention of aiding the tyrants of

France in subverting the Government of the United States of America. Philadelphia, May, 1798.

27. [*Abridgment.*] The CANNIBAL'S PROGRESS; or the dreadful horrors of French invasion, as displayed by the Republican officers and soldiers, in their perfidy, rapacity, ferociousness, and brutality, exercised towards the innocent inhabitants of Germany. Abridged from the translation of Anthony Aufrere, Esq. Philadelphia, June, 1798.

[Introductory Address, by the Editor.]

28. REMARKS ON THE EXPLANATION, lately published by Dr. Priestley, respecting the intercepted letters of his friend and disciple, John H. Stone. To which is added, a Certificate of Civism for Joseph Priestley, jun. By Peter Porcupine. Philadelphia, 1799. 8vo. pp. 52.

29. The TRIAL OF REPUBLICANISM; or a series of political papers, proving the injurious and debasing consequences of Republican Government, and written Constitutions. With an introductory address to the Hon. Thomas Erskine, Esq. Philadelphia, June, 1799.

30. A CONCISE AND COMPREHENSIVE HISTORY OF PRINCE SUWOROW'S CAMPAIGN IN ITALY, IN THE YEAR 1799. Philadelphia, Jan. 1800.

31. The RUSHLIGHT; by the help of which wayward and disaffected Britons may see a complete specimen of the baseness, dishonesty, ingratitude, and perfidy of Republicans, and of the profligacy, injustice, and tyranny of Republican Governments. By Peter Porcupine. Five numbers. New York, Feb.—April, 1800. pp. 258.

The RUSHLIGHT, No. 6. London and New York, August, 1800. pp. 51.

[An Address to the People of England.
To the People of the United States of America.]

32. The PORCUPINE; daily newspaper. London, Oct. 30, 1800. . . (?) Nov. 1801.

33. PORCUPINE'S WORKS; containing various writings and selections, exhibiting a faithful picture of the United States of America; of their governments, laws, politics and resources; of the characters of their presidents, governors, legislators, magistrates, and military men; and of the customs, manners, morals, religion, virtues, and vices of the people; comprising also a complete series of historical documents and remarks, from the end of the war, in 1783, to the election of the president, in March, 1801. By William Cobbett. In twelve volumes. London, 1801. 8vo.

[The contents of the first eleven volumes include those of the above-enumerated publications under articles 6—31, with the addition of complementary matter:—

A summary view of the politics of the United States from the close of the war to the year 1794.

Account of the insurrection in the western counties of Pennsylvania, in 1794.

A summary of the proceedings in Congress, during the session which commenced on the 4th of November, 1794.

Proceedings relative to the British treaty.

An analysis of Randolph's Vindication.

Miscellaneous State Papers [French depredations; Washington's retirement; impeachment of Wm. Blount, &c.]

Miscellaneous Anecdotes.

Selections from *Porcupine's Gazette.*

The twelfth volume contains a series of historical documents and remarks, from Dec. 1799 to March 1801; some of which are extracted from the London *Porcupine.*]

34. A COLLECTION OF FACTS AND OBSERVATIONS, RELATIVE TO THE PEACE WITH BONAPARTE, chiefly extracted from the *Porcupine*, and including Mr. Cobbett's letters to Lord Hawkesbury. To which is added, an appendix, containing the divers conventions, treaties, state-papers, and despatches connected with the subject; together with extracts from the speeches of Mr. Pitt, Mr. Fox, and Lord Hawkesbury, respecting Bonaparte and a peace with France. By William Cobbett. London, Nov. 2, 1801. 8vo. pp. 231—lxiii.

35. LETTERS TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE HENRY ADDINGTON, Chancellor of His Majesty's Exchequer, on the fatal effects of

the peace with Buonaparte, particularly with respect to the colonies, the commerce, the manufactures, and the constitution of the United Kingdom. By William Cobbett. London, January, 1802. 8vo.

[These two articles [34, 35] were reproduced, in part, under the following title: "Letters to the Right Honourable Lord Hawkesbury, and to the Right Honourable Henry Addington, on the peace with Buonaparte, to which is added an appendix, containing a collection (now greatly enlarged) of all the conventions, treaties, speeches, and other documents connected with the subject. By William Cobbett. Second Edition. London, January, 1802.]

36. COBBETT'S WEEKLY POLITICAL REGISTER. London, January, 1803—June, 1835.

[Fortnightly in Jan. 1803, afterwards weekly, except April 12 to July 5, 1817; Mar. 21, May 2, June 27, Aug. 15, Oct. 17, 24, 31, Nov. 7, 14, 1818; Aug. 21, Oct. 16, Nov. 20, 27, 1819; Feb. 26, Mar. 4, 11, 18, 1820—all of which were missed. Price 10*d.*, occasionally 1*s.*, until October, 1816, thence 2*d.* till Jan. 6, 1820 (July to October, 1816, reprinted in cheap form); 6*d.* from Jan. 15, 1820 to Dec. 1827; 7*d.* from Jan. 1828; 1*s.* from Oct. 30, 1830; 1*s.* 2*d.* from Jan. 8, 1831.]

The first four vols. (*Cobbett's Annual Register* on title) published with supplements of state papers, &c.

Cobbett's Weekly Political Pamphlet, on and after Feb. 15, 1817; again called *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register* in the following year.

Cobbett's Weekly Register in April, 1821.

Cobbett's Weekly Political Register, during and after 1828.

Many articles were reprinted from the *Register*, and published separately. The most important were:—

RURAL RIDES in the counties of Surrey, Kent, Sussex, Hampshire, Wiltshire, Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Somersetshire, Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk, and Hertfordshire; with economical and political observations relative to matters applicable to, and illustrated by the state of those counties respectively. London, 1830. 12mo. pp. 668.

COBBETT'S TOUR IN SCOTLAND, and in the four northern counties of England: in the autumn of the year 1832. London, 1833. 12mo. pp. 264.

[The *Register* was continued, at intervals, after Cobbett's death. It appeared as late as September, 1836.]

37. [*Translation.*] The Empire of Germany divided into departments, under the prefecture of the Elector of ——. To which is prefixed, a memoir on the political and military state of the continent, written by the same author. Translated from the French by William Cobbett. *Preface* by the translator. London, Jan. 1803.

[Also printed in the Supplement to vol. 2 of the *Register.*]

38. COBBETT'S PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES. London, Dec. 1803, &c.

[In the year 1812 this work passed into the hands of Mr. T. C. Hansard, and new titles were given to all volumes from the commencement issued after that date:—"The Parliamentary Debates from the year 1803 to the present time; forming a continuation of the work entitled, 'The Parliamentary History of England from the earliest period to the present time.'" An advertisement, inserted in reprints of the first volume, explained the alteration to the public:—"London, Oct. 1812. Mr. Cobbett having disposed of his interest in this work, it is now continued under the general title of 'The Parliamentary Debates;'" and proceeded to state that the general conduct of the work was not in any respect affected by the alteration.]

39. The POLITICAL PROTEUS. A view of the public character and conduct of R. B. Sheridan, Esq., as exhibited in, I. Ten letters to him; II. Selections from his parliamentary speeches from the commencement of the French Revolution; III. Selections from his speeches at the Whig club, and at other public meetings. By William Cobbett. London, Jan. 1804. 8vo. pp. 388.

[The letters had previously appeared in the *Register.*]

40. [*Compilation.*] COBBETT'S SPIRIT OF THE PUBLIC JOURNALS for the Year 1804. London, Jan. 1805. pp. xx.—1219.

["Letters, Essays, &c., taken from the English, American, and French journals for the year 1804, the subjects being all of that nature which render them interesting to the politician."]

41. COBBETT'S PARLIAMENTARY HISTORY OF ENGLAND, from

the Norman Conquest, in 1066, to the year 1803, from which last-mentioned epoch it is continued downwards in the work entitled, "Cobbett's Parliamentary Debates." London Oct. 1806.

[The tenth and succeeding volumes are called, "The Parliamentary History of England."]

42. COBBETT'S COMPLETE COLLECTION OF STATE TRIALS and Proceedings for High Treason and other Crimes and Misdemeanors from the Earliest Period to the Present Time. London, 1809, &c.

[After the tenth volume, when Cobbett's interest in the publication had been transferred, the title ran:—"A complete collection . . . . to the present time. With notes and other illustrations. Compiled by T. B. Howell, Esq., F.R.S. F.S.A."

Vols. XXII.—XXXIII.:—" . . . . and continued from the year 1783 to the present time. By Thomas Jones Howell Esq." Vol. XXXIV:—"General index to . . . . By David Jardine, Esq., of the Middle Temple, Barrister-at-law."]

43. [*Preface*, &c.] AN ESSAY ON SHEEP, intended chiefly to promote the introduction and propagation of merinos in the United States of America. . . . . By R. R. Livingston. Printed by order of the Legislature of the State of New York. London, reprinted: with a preface and explanatory notes by William Cobbett. 1811.

44. PAPER AGAINST GOLD, AND GLORY AGAINST PROSPERITY. Or, an account of the rise, progress, extent, and present state of the funds and of the paper-money of Great Britain; and also of the situation of that country as to its debt and other expenses; its navigation, commerce and manufactures; its taxes, population, and paupers; drawn from authentic documents, and brought down to the end of the year 1814. In two volumes. By William Cobbett. London, 1815. pp. viii.—523, and iv.—100—cxxvii.

[The title slightly altered, in a later issue, with an Introduction, dated 1817:—

PAPER AGAINST GOLD; or the History and Mystery of the Bank of England, of the Debt, of the Stocks, of the Sinking Fund, and of all the other tricks and contrivances, carried on by the means of Paper Money. 8vo. Columns viii.—470; and 12mo. pp. xviii.—332.

"A Preliminary part of Paper against Gold," consisting of essays written between 1803 and 1806, was published in 1821.]

45. A YEAR'S RESIDENCE IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. Treating of the face of the country, the climate, the soil, the products, the mode of cultivating the land, the prices of lands, of labour, of food, of raiment; of the expenses of housekeeping, and of the usual manner of living; of the manners and customs of the people; and of the institutions of the country, civil, political, and religious. In three parts. By William Cobbett; London, 1818. 8vo. pp. viii.—610; also 12mo, pp. 370.

46. A GRAMMAR OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE, in a series of letters. Intended for the use of schools and of young persons in general; but, more especially for the use of soldiers, sailors, apprentices, and plough-boys. By William Cobbett. London, 1818. pp. iv.—186.

47. COBBETT'S EVENING POST. Daily newspaper; London, January 29,—April 1, 1820.

48. The AMERICAN GARDENER; or a treatise on the situation, soil, fencing, and laying-out of gardens; on the making and managing of hot-beds and green-houses; and on the propagation and cultivation of the several sorts of table vegetables, herbs, fruits, and flowers. London, 1821. Par. 391 (not paged).

49. COBBETT'S MONTHLY RELIGIOUS TRACTS. London, 1821–22; afterwards, TWELVE SERMONS ON, 1. Hypocrisy and Cruelty; 2. Drunkenness; 3. Bribery; 4. The Rights of the Poor; 5. Unjust Judges; 6. The Sluggard; 7. Murder; 8. Gaming; 9. Public robbery; 10. The Unnatural Mother; 11. Forbidding marriage; 12. Parsons and Tithes. By William Cobbett. 12mo. pp. 295; a later edition, pp. 240.

To these was subsequently added:

Good Friday, or the murder of Jesus Christ by the Jews, pp. 24.

50. COTTAGE ECONOMY: containing information relative to the brewing of beer, making of bread, keeping of cows, pigs, bees, ewes, goats, poultry, and rabbits, and relative to other matters deemed useful in the conducting of the affairs of a labourer's family; to which are added, instructions relative to the selecting, the cutting,

and the bleaching of the plants of English grass and grain, for the purpose of making hats and bonnets; and also instructions for erecting and using ice-houses, after the Virginian manner. By William Cobbett. London, 1821. Par. 265 (not paged).

51. COBBETT'S COLLECTIVE COMMENTARIES: or, remarks on the proceedings in the collective wisdom of the nation, during the session which began on the 5th of February, and ended on the 6th of August, in the 3rd year of the reign of King George the Fourth, and in the year of our Lord, 1822; being the third session of the first parliament of that king. To which are subjoined, a complete list of the acts passed during the session, with elucidations; and other notes and matters; forming, altogether, a short, but clear history of the collective wisdom for the year. London, 1822. pp. 320.

[Mostly from daily contributions to the *Statesman* newspaper.]

52. [*Preface*, &c.] The HORSE-HOEING HUSBANDRY: or, a treatise on the principles of tillage and vegetation, wherein is taught a method of introducing a sort of vineyard culture into the corn-fields, in order to increase their product and diminish the common expenses. By Jethro Tull, of Shalborne in the County of Berks.

To which is prefixed, an introduction, explanatory of some circumstances connected with the history and division of the work; and containing an account of certain experiments of recent date. By Willam Cobbett. London, 1822. 8vo. pp. xix.—332.

53. COBBETT'S FRENCH GRAMMAR; or plain instructions for the learning of French. London, 1823.

[A book of exercises was added (1834), by James P. Cobbett.]

54. A HISTORY OF THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION IN ENGLAND AND IRELAND: showing how that event has impoverished and degraded the main body of the people in those countries. In a series of letters, addressed to all sensible and just Englishmen. By William Cobbett. London, 1824-25. 12mo, 478 par.; and 8vo.

A second Part; containing a list of the abbeys, priories, nunneries, hospitals, and other religious foundations, in England and Wales, and in Ireland, confiscated, seized on, or alienated, by the Protestant "Reformation" Sovereigns and Parliaments. London, 1827.

55. THE WOODLANDS : or, a treatise on the preparing of ground for planting; on the planting; on the cultivating; on the pruning; and on the cutting down of forest trees and underwoods; describing the usual growth and size, and the uses of each sort of tree, the seed of each, the season and manner of collecting the seed, the manner of preserving and of sowing it, and also the manner of managing the young plants until fit to plant out; the trees being arranged in alphabetical order, and the list of them, including those of America as well as those of England, and the English, French, and Latin name being prefixed to the directions relative to each tree respectively. By William Cobbett. London, 1825. 8vo. Par. 601 (not paged).

56. COBBETT'S POOR MAN'S FRIEND; or a defence of the rights of those who do the work and fight the battles. London, 1826. 12mo. pp. 72.

57. THE ENGLISH GARDENER; a treatise on the kitchen garden, the flower garden, the shrubbery, and the orchard. With a calendar, giving instructions relative to the sowings, plantings, prunings, and other labours, to be performed in the gardens, in each month of the year. By William Cobbett. London, 1827. 8vo and 12mo. pp. 405.

[An enlargement of "The American Gardener," with certain parts adapted to the English climate].

58. A TREATISE ON COBBETT'S CORN, containing instructions for propagating and cultivating the plant, and for harvesting and preserving the crop; and also an account of the several uses to which the produce is applied, with minute directions relative to each mode of application. By William Cobbett. London, 1828. 12mo. Par. 203.

[The title-page and "contents" were printed on paper made from the corn.]

59. [*Translation.*] ELEMENTS OF THE ROMAN HISTORY, in English and French, from the foundation of Rome to the battle of Actium, selected from the best authors, ancient and modern, with a series of questions at the end of each chapter. For the use of schools and young persons in general. The English by William Cobbett; the French by J. H. Sievrac. London, 1828. 12mo. pp. ix.—265.

60. The EMIGRANTS' GUIDE; in ten letters addressed to the tax-payers of England; containing information of every kind, necessary to persons who are about to emigrate; including several authentic and most interesting letters from English emigrants, now in America, to their friends in England; and an account of the prices of house and land, recently obtained from America by Mr. Cobbett. By William Cobbett. London, 1828. 12mo. pp. 168.

61. ADVICE TO YOUNG MEN, and (incidentally) to young women, in the middle and higher ranks of life: in a series of letters addressed to a youth, a bachelor, a lover, a husband, a father, a citizen, or a subject. By William Cobbett. London, 1830. 12mo. Par. 355.

62. A SPELLING-BOOK, with appropriate lessons in reading, and with a stepping-stone to English grammar. By William Cobbett. London, 1831. 12mo. pp. iv.—185.

63. ELEVEN LECTURES ON THE FRENCH AND BELGIAN REVOLUTIONS, and English boroughmongering, delivered in the theatre of the Rotunda, Blackfriars Bridge. By William Cobbett, with a portrait. London, 1830. 8vo.

64. COBBETT'S PLAN OF PARLIAMENTARY REFORM, addressed to the young men of England. London, 1830.

65. COBBETT'S MANCHESTER LECTURES, in support of his fourteen reform propositions . . . .

To which is subjoined, a letter to Mr. O'Connell, on his speech, made in Dublin, on the 4th Jan. 1832, against the proposition for the establishing of poor laws in Ireland. London, 1832. 12mo. pp. xii.—179.

66. A GEOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY OF ENGLAND AND WALES; containing the names, in alphabetical order, of all the counties, with their several subdivisions into hundreds, lathes, rapes, wapentakes, wards, or divisions; and an account of the distribution of the counties into circuits, dioceses, and parliamentary divisions. Also, the names (under that of each county respectively) in alphabetical order, of all the cities, boroughs, market towns, villages, hamlets, and tithings, with the distance of each from London, or from the nearest market town, and with the population, and other

interesting particulars relative to each; besides which there are maps; first, one of the whole country, showing the local situation of the counties relatively to each other; and, then, each county is also preceded by a map, showing, in the same manner, the local situations of the cities, boroughs, and market towns. Four tables are added; first, a statistical table of all the counties, and then three tables, showing the new divisions and distributions enacted by the reform-law of 4th June, 1832. By William Cobbett. London, 1832. 8vo. pp. lxxxiv.—547.

67. [*Preface.*] The CURSE OF PAPER-MONEY AND BANKING: By Wm. Gouge, of Philadelphia, 1833. London, reprinted, 1833, with an introduction (pp. xxii.) by William Cobbett.

68. HISTORY OF THE REGENCY AND REIGN OF KING GEORGE THE FOURTH. By William Cobbett. London, 1830—1834. 2 vols. 12mo.

69. [*Abridgment.*] LIFE OF ANDREW JACKSON, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. Abridged and compiled by William Cobbett, M.P. for Oldham. London, 1834. 12mo. pp. x.—142.

70. A NEW FRENCH AND ENGLISH DICTIONARY. In two parts. Part I. French and English; Part II. English and French. By William Cobbett, M.P. for Oldham. London, 1834. 8vo. pp. xiv.—408—418.

71. SURPLUS POPULATION, AND POOR-LAW BILL; a comedy in three acts. By William Cobbett, M.P. London, 1835.

72. COBBETT'S LEGACY TO LABOURERS; or, what is the right which the lords, baronets, and squires, have to possess the lands, or to make the laws? In six letters, addressed to the working people of the whole kingdom. With a dedication to Sir Robert Peel. London, 1835. 16mo. p. 141.

73. COBBETT'S LEGACY TO PEEL; or, an inquiry with respect to what the right honourable baronet will now do with the House of Commons, with Ireland, with the English Church and the Dissenters, with the swarms of pensioners, &c., with the crown lands

and the army, with the currency and the debt. In six letters. London, 1835. 18mo.

74. COBBETT'S LEGACY TO PARSONS; or, have the clergy of the established church an equitable right to the tithes, or to any other thing called church property, greater than the dissenters have to the same? And, ought there, or ought there not, to be a separation of the Church from the State? In six letters, addressed to the church-parsons in general, including the cathedral and college clergy and the bishops. With a dedication to Blomfield, Bishop of London. London, 1835. 16mo. pp. 192.

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